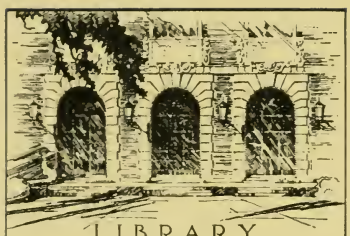
THYRZA



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THYRZA

VOL. II.

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THYRZA

A TALE

BY

GEORGE GISSING

AUTHOR OF 'DEMOS'
ETC.

ἄμμες δὲ βροτοὶ οἶδε· βροτοὺς βροτοὶ ἀείδωμες.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1887

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THYRZA.

CHAPTER I.

A SECOND VISIT TO WALNUT TREE WALK.

The man of reserve betrays happiness by disposition for companionship. Surprised that the world all at once looks so bright to his own eyes, he desires to learn how others view it. The unhappy man is intensely subjective; his own impressions are so inburnt that those of others seem to him unimportant—nay, impertinent. And what is so bitter as the spectacle of alien joy when one's own heart is waste?

Gilbert Grail was no longer the silent and lonely man that he had been. The one with whom he had formed something like a friendship had gone apart; in the nature of things Ackroyd and he could never again associate as formerly, though when need was they spoke without show of estrangement; but others whom he had been wont to hold at a distance by his irresponsiveness were now of interest to him, and, after

the first surprise at the change in him, they met his quiet advances in a friendly way. Among his acquaintances there were, of course, few fitted to be in any sense his associates. Two, however, he induced to attend Egremont's lectures, thus raising the number of the audience to eight. These recruits were not enthusiastic over 'Thoughts for the Present'; one of them persevered to the end of the course, the other made an excuse for absenting himself after two evenings.

Gilbert held seriously in mind the pledge he had given to Egremont to work for the spread of humane principles. One of those with whom he often spoke of these matters was Bunce—himself a man made hard to approach by rude experiences. Bunce was a locksmith; some twelve years ago he had had a little workshop of his own, but a disastrous marriage brought him back to the position of a journeyman, and at present he was as often out of work as not. Happily his wife was dead; he found it a hard task to keep his three children. The truth was that his domestic miseries had, when at their height, driven him to the public-house, and only by dint of struggles which no soul save his own was aware of was he gradually recovering self-confidence and the trust of employers. His attendance at Egremont's lectures was part of the cure. Though it was often hard to go out at night and leave his little ones, he did so that his resolve might not suffer. He and they lived in one room, in the same house which sheltered Miss Totty Nancarrow.

On the evening which Egremont spent at Eastbourne, Grail came across Bunce on the way home from the factory. They resumed a discussion interrupted a day or two before, and, as they passed the end of Newport Street, Bunce asked his companion to enter for the purpose of looking at a certain paper in which he had found what seemed to him cogent arguments. They went up the dark musty staircase, and entered the room opposite to Totty's.

'Hollo!' Bunce cried, finding no light. 'What's up? Nellie! Jack!'

It was usual, since the eldest child was at the hospital, for the landlady to come and light a lamp for the two little ones when it grew dusk. Bunce had an exaggerated fear of giving trouble, and only sheer necessity had compelled him to request this small service.

'They'll be downstairs, I suppose,' he muttered, striking a match.

The hungry room had no occupants. On the floor lay a skeleton doll, a toy tambourine, a whipping-top, and a wried tin whistle. There was one bedstead, and a bed made up on a mattress laid on the floor. On a round clothless table stood two plates, one with a piece of bread and butter remaining, and two cups and saucers. The fire had died out.

A shrill voice was calling from below stairs.

'Mr. Bunce! Mr. Bunce! Your children is gone out with Miss Nancarrow as far as the butcher's. They

won't be more than five minutes, I was to say, if you came in.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Ladds,' Bunce replied briefly.

He came in and closed the door.

'That's a new thing,' he said, as if doubtful whether to be satisfied or not. 'I hope she won't begin taking 'em about. Still, she isn't a bad lot, that girl. Do you know anything of her?'

'Why, yes. I've heard of her often from Miss Trent. Isn't she a good deal with Ackroyd?'

'Can't say. She's not a bad lot. She's going to take my Bessie down to Eastbourne at the end of the week.'

'But why don't you go yourself? It would do you good.'

Bunce shrugged his shoulders.

'No, I can't go myself. Just for the child's sake, I have to put up with that kind of thing, but I don't like it. It's charity, after all, and I couldn't face those people at the home.'

'What home is it?' Grail asked. He knew, but out of delicacy wished the explanation to come from Bunce.

'I don't know as it has any name. It seems to be in connection with the Children's Hospital. The matron, or whatever you call her, is a Mrs. Ormonde.'

'Oh, I know about her!' Gilbert exclaimed. 'She's a friend of Mr. Egremont's. He's spoken of her once or twice to me. You needn't be afraid of meeting *her*.

She's a lady who has given up her own house for this purpose; as good a woman, I believe, as lives.'

'Well,' said Bunce, doggedly, 'I'm thankful to her, but I can't face her. What's this, I'd like to know?'

His eye had caught something that looked like a small pamphlet lying near the fireplace. He stooped to pick it up.

'If they're beginning to throw my papers about——'

The sudden silence caused Gilbert to look at him. Bunce was not a well-favoured man, but ordinarily a rugged honesty helped the misfortunes of his features, a sort of good-humour, too, which seemed unable to find free play. But of a sudden his face had become ferocious, startling in its exasperated surprise, its savage wrath. His eyes glared blood-shot, his teeth were uncovered, his jaws protruded as if in an animal impulse to rend.

'How's this got here?' he almost roared. 'Who brings things o' this kind into my room? Who's put this into my children's hands?'

'What on earth is it?' Gilbert asked in amazement.

'What is it? Look at that! Look at that, I say! If this is the landlady's work, I'll find a new room this very night!'

Gilbert tried to take the paper, but Bunce's hand, which trembled violently, held it with such a grip that there was no getting possession of it. With difficulty Grail perceived that it was a religious tract.

'Why, there's no great harm done,' he said. 'The children can't read, can they?'

'Jack can! The boy can! I'm teaching him myself.'

He raved. The sight of that propagandist document affected him, to use the old simile, as scarlet does a bull. Gilbert knew the man's prejudices, but, in his own more cultured mind, could not have conceived such frenzy of hatred as this piece of Christian doctrine excited in Bunce. For five minutes the poor fellow was possessed; sweat covered his face; he was shaken as if by bodily anguish. He read scraps aloud, commenting on them with scornful violence. Last of all he flung the paper to the ground and trampled it into shreds. Gilbert had at first difficulty in refraining from laughter; then he sat down and waited with some impatience for the storm to spend itself.

'Come, come, Bunce,' he said, when he could make himself heard, 'remember Mr. Egremont's lecture on those things. I think pretty much as you do about Christianity—about the dogmas, that is; but we've no need to fear it in this way. Let's take what good there is in it, and have nothing to do with the foolish parts.'

Bunce seated himself, exhausted. Not a few among the intelligent artisans of our time are filled with that spirit of hatred against all things Christian; in him it had become a mania. Egremont's eirenikon had been a hard saying to him; he had tried to think it

over, because of his respect for the teacher, but as yet it had resulted in no sobering. His mind was not sufficiently prepared for lessons of wisdom; had Egremont witnessed this scene, he might well have groaned in spirit over the ineffectualness of his prophesying.

Gilbert spoke with earnestness. To him his friend's teaching had come as true and refreshing, and he could not lose such an opportunity as this of pushing on the work. He insisted on the beauty there was in the Christian legend, on its profound spiritual significance, on the poverty of all religious schemes which man had devised to replace it.

'We want no religion!' cried Bunce, angrily. 'It's been the curse of the world. Look at the Inquisition! Look at the religious wars! Look at the Jesuits!'

He was primed with such historic instances out of books and pamphlets spread broadcast by the contemporary apostles of 'free thought.' Of history proper he of course knew nothing, but these splinters of quasi-historic evidence had run deep into his flesh. Despise him, if you like, but try to understand him. It was his very humaneness which brought him to this pass; recitals of old savagery had poisoned his blood, and the 'spirit of the age' churned his crude acquisitions into a witch's cauldron. Academic sweetness and light was a feeble antidote to offer him.

'A century of it to come!' had said Mr. Newthorpe. Nay, it were well indeed if a century of humanism could penetrate to the darkest places of ignorance, and

root up all the bitter weeds planted by social wrong. If in another thousand years the multitude can bend in reasonable devotion before the purified altar of the faith, how marvellously will the world have wrought!

Gilbert soothed his companion for the time. He knew where to stop, and promised himself to find a fitter season for pursuing the same subject. Just as he had reverted to the topic of conversation which brought him here, there came a knock at the door.

'Come in!' growled Bunce.

Totty Nancarrow appeared. One of her hands led a little fellow of seven, a bright lad, munching a 'treacle-stick;' the other, a little girl a year younger, who exclaimed as she entered:

'Been a walk with Miss Nanco!'

'We've been to the butcher's with Miss Nancarrow, father,' declared the boy, consciously improving on his sister's report.

Totty had drawn back a step at the sight of Grail. He and she knew each other by sight, but had not yet exchanged words.

'I found them in the dark, Mr. Bunce,' she said, half laughing. 'Mrs. Ladds was out, and couldn't get back in time to light the lamp for them. I hope you don't mind. I thought a little bit of a walk 'ud do them good.'

Bunce always softened at the sight of his little ones.

'I'm much obliged to you, Miss Nancarrow,' he said.

'Miss Nanco bought me sweets,' remarked little

Nelly, when her father had drawn her between his knees. And she exhibited a half-sucked lollipop. Her brother hid away his own delicacy, feeling all at once that it compromised his masculine superiority.

'Then I'm very angry with Miss Nanco,' replied Bunce. 'I hope she'll never do anything o' the kind again.'

Totty laughed and drew back into the passage. Thence she said:

'Could I speak to you a minute, Mr. Bunce?'

He went out to her, and half closed the door behind him. Totty led him a step or two down the stairs, then whispered:

'I'm so sorry, Mr. Bunce, but I find I can't very well go on Saturday. But I've just seen Miss Trent, the one that's going to marry Mr. Grail, you know; and she says she'd be only too glad to go, that is if Mr. Grail 'll let her, and she's quite sure he will. Would you ask Mr. Grail? Thyrza—that's Miss Trent, I mean—was so anxious; she's never been to the seaside. Will you just ask him?'

'Oh yes, I will.'

'I'm sorry I've had to draw back, Mr. Bunce, after offering——'

'It don't matter a bit, Miss Nancarrow. Miss Trent 'll do just as well, if she really don't mind the trouble.'

'Trouble! Why, she'd give anything to go! Please get Mr. Grail to let her.'

Bunce returned to his room and closed the door. Gilbert had taken Nelly on his knee, and was satisfying her by tasting the remnant of lollipop.

'I say, Jack!' cried the father, his eye again catching sight of the bruised tract on the floor. 'Who brought that here?'

'I did, father,' answered the youngster, stoutly, though he saw displeasure in his father's face.

'Where did you get it, eh?' was asked sharply.

'A lady gave it me at the door.'

'Then I'd thank ladies to mind their own business. And you never take anything else at the door; do you understand that, Jack?'

'Yes, father.'

Bunce turned to Gilbert, who was waiting to depart.

'Miss Nancarrow tells me she can't go to Eastbourne on Saturday. But she says Miss Trent's very anxious to go instead of her. What do you think of it?'

Grail reflected. The plan pleased him on the whole, though he had just a doubt whether Thyrza ought to travel by herself.

'I see no reason why she shouldn't,' he said. 'It'll be a pleasure to her, and I shall be glad to have her do you the kindness.'

'Then could I see her before Saturday?'

'Come in to-morrow night, will you?'

The second course of lectures was at an end.

Egremont had only delivered one a week since Christmas, and even so it cost him no little effort to spread his 'Thoughts for the Present' over the three months. Latterly he had blended a good deal of historical disquisition with his prophecy: the result was to himself profoundly unsatisfactory. He sighed with relief as he dismissed his poor little audience for the last time. For the future he had made no promises, beyond saying that in his library-building there were two rooms which were to be devoted to lectures. The library itself was now his chief care. This was something solid; it would re-establish him in his self-confidence.

Yes; 'Thoughts for the Present' had been a failure. Mr. Newthorpe was right in supposing that they would contain much good matter, but such ideas as were in themselves fruitful were lost amid bushels of—to be plain, of nonsense. Egremont knew it too well. He had made prophecy a business, and suffered the natural penalty.

The first lecture was far away the best. It dealt with Religion. Addressed to an audience ready for such philosophical views, it would have met with a flattering reception. Egremont's point of view was, strictly, the æsthetic; he aimed at replacing religious enthusiasm, as commonly understood, by æsthetic. The loveliness of the Christian legend—from that he started. He dealt with the New Testament very much as he had formerly dealt with the Elizabethan poets.

He would have no appeal to the vulgar by aggressive rationalists. Let rationalism filter down in the course of time; the vulgar were not prepared for it as yet. It was bad that they should be superstitious, but worse, far worse, that they should be brutally irreverent, and brutal irreverence inevitably came of atheism preached at the street corner. The men who preached it were themselves the very last to guide human souls; they were of coarsest fibre, without a note of music in them, fit only for the world's grosser purposes. And they presumed to attack the ministry of Christ! It was good, all that he had to say on that point, the better that it made two or three of his hearers feel a little sore and indignant. Yet, as a whole, the lecture appealed to but one of the audience. Gilbert Grail heard it with emotion, and carried it away in his heart. To the others it was little more than the sounding of brass and the tinkling of cymbals.

The second lecture was on Newspapers. Perhaps one had better leave this particular piece of prophecy in the care of the past. A newspaper was just now our friend's *bête noire*; to talk of the daily press made him little less angry than Christianity made poor Bunce. I won't take it upon myself to say that he was wholly wrong; it is even possible that, delivered to an audience of journalists, this address might have performed a little blood-letting of a salutary kind. Yet, after all, these gentlemen have thick skins, and perhaps it would have been wiser in Egremont to have left

them to the course of nature. I fear he did no good under the circumstances; Grail was no journal-reader, and of the others no one read newspapers a whit the less.

Well, it was all a mistake, that course of lectures. A year or two later Egremont could not recur to it in thought without a reddening of the cheek—a disagreeable experience which only those of us are free from who have never known generous instincts in youth. Is it not strange, by the way, that the most purely noble of a grown man's recollections are precisely those which make him feel most shame?

To-night—Friday—he was going to Grail's. Of course no ceremonious preparation was necessary, yet he wasted a couple of hours previous to his time for setting forth. He could not apply himself to anything; he paced his room. Indeed, he had paced his room much of late. Week by week he seemed to have grown more unsettled in mind. He had said to himself that all would be well when he had seen Annabel. He had seen her, and his trouble was graver than before.

At the hour when Egremont set out for Lambeth Lydia was busy dressing her sister's hair. Perhaps such a thing had never happened before, as that Thyrza's hair should have needed doing twice in one day. She had begged it this evening.

'You won't mind, Lyddy? I feel it's rough, and I think I ought to look nice—don't you?'

'You're a vain little thing!'

'I don't think I am, Lyddy. It's only natural.'

'Well, you must sit stiller than that, then. I can't do it if you fidget so, child!'

'Oh Lyddy!'

'Why, what is it now?'

Thryza had started up from the chair, had thrown her hands together above her head, and seemed ready to leap with excitement.

'I can't help it! I feel happy—so happy, I cannot tell you! There's so many things. Think of going to the seaside! And—oh, all sorts of things!'

'The time's going on,' Lydia warned her. 'You have to change your dress yet, you know. Mr. Egremont may be here any time now.'

'Be quick then, Lyddy! Oh, be quick! How hot my face is! Do I look red, dear?'

'Now you've asked me that twenty times, if you've asked it once. Don't be so childish. I shall shake you, Thyrza!'

'Well, I'm sure that won't make me any better. Now, see how quiet I am!'

For one minute she was still. But her eyes, how their blue depths glistened! What life there was in the play of her features!

'Lyddy, I think you ought to come down as well.'

'I've told you that I shan't, so do have done!'

'Well, dear, it's only because I want you to see Mr. Egremont.'

'I've seen him, and that's enough. If you're going to be a lady and make friends with grand people, that's no reason why I should.'

'You'll have to some day.'

'I don't think I shall,' said Lydia, as she began the braiding. 'You and me are very different, dear. I shall go on in my own way. *Do* keep still! *How* am I to tie this ribbon?'

'Kiss me, Lyddy! Say that you love me!'

'I don't think I shall.'

'Lyddy, dear.'

It was said so gravely that Lydia, having finished her task, came round before the chair and looked in her sister's face.

'What?'

'I think I should die if I hadn't someone to love me.'

'I don't think you'll ever want that, Thyrza.'

The other drew a profound sigh, so profound that it left her bosom trembling. And for a few moments she sat in a dream.

Then she proceeded to change her dress and make ready for her formal appearance downstairs on the occasion of Egremont's visit. She had never been so anxious to look well. Lydia affected much impatience with her, but in truth was profoundly happy in her sister's happiness. She looked often at the beautiful face, and thought how proud Gilbert must be.

'Do you think I ought to shake hands with Mr. Egremont?' Thyrza asked.

'If he offers to, you must,' was Lydia's opinion. 'But not if he doesn't.'

'He did when he said good-bye at the school.'

Before long they heard the expected double knock at the house-door. They had left their own door ajar that they might not miss this signal. Thyrza sprang to the head of the stairs and listened. She heard Gilbert admit his visitor, and she heard the latter's voice. It was now a month since the meeting at the school, but the voice sounded so exactly as she expected that it brought back every detail of that often-recalled interview, and made her heart throb with excitement.

She was now to wait a whole quarter of an hour.

'Sit down and read,' said Lydia, who had herself begun to sew in the usual methodical way.

Thyrza pretended to obey. For two minutes she sat still, then asked how they were to know when a quarter of an hour had passed.

'I'll tell you,' said the other. 'Sit quiet, there's a good baby, and I'll buy you a cake next time we go out.'

Thyrza drew in her breath and—somehow the time was lived through.

'Now I think you may go,' Lydia said.

Thyrza seemed to have become indifferent. She turned over a page of her book, and at length rose very

slowly. Lydia watched her askance; she thought she saw signs of timidity. But Thyrza presently moved to the door and went downstairs with her lightest step.

Gilbert had told her not to knock. Her hand was on the knob some moments before she ventured to turn it. She heard Egremont laughing—his natural laugh which was so attractive—and then there fell a silence. She entered.

No, Gilbert had not seated his visitor in the easy chair; that must be reserved for someone of more importance. Egremont rose with a look of pleasure.

'You know Miss Trent already?' Gilbert said to him.

Thryza drew near. She did not hear very distinctly what Egremont was saying, but certainly he was offering to shake hands. Then Gilbert placed the easy chair in a convenient position, and she did her best to sit as she always did. Her manner was not awkward—it was impossible for her to be awkward—but she was afraid of saying something that 'wasn't grammar,' and to Egremont's agreeable remarks she replied shortly. Yet even this only gave her an air of shyness which was itself a grace. When Grail had entered into the conversation she was able to collect herself.

Gilbert said presently: 'Miss Trent is going to take Bunce's child to Eastbourne to-morrow, to Mrs. Ormonde's.'

'Indeed!' Egremont exclaimed. 'I was there on Wednesday and heard that the child was coming. But this arrangement hadn't been made then, I think?'

'No. Somebody else was to have gone, but she has found she can't.'

'You will be glad to know Mrs. Ormonde, I'm sure,' Egremont said to Thyrza.

'And I'm glad to go to the seaside,' Thyrza returned. 'I've never seen the sea.'

'Haven't you? How I wish I could have your enjoyment of to-morrow, then!'

Mrs. Grail was knitting. She said: 'I think you have voyaged a great deal, sir?'

It led to talk of travel. Egremont was drawn into stories of East and West. Ah, how good it was to get out of the circle of social prophecy! It was like breathing the very mid-Atlantic sky to talk gaily and freely of things wherein no theory was involved, which left aside every ideal save that of joyous living. Thyrza listened. He—he before her—had trodden lands whereof the names were to her like echoes from fairy tales; he had passed days and nights on the bosom of the great sea, which she looked forward to beholding almost with fear; he had seen it in tempest, and the laughing descriptions he gave of vast green rolling mountains made to her inward sight an awful reality.

'You never thought of going to any of the Colonies?' Egremont asked of Gilbert.

'Yes, years ago,' was the reply, in the tone of a man who sees the trouble of life behind him. 'I think at one time my mother rather despised me because I couldn't make up my mind to go and seek my fortune.'

'I never despised you, my dear,' said the old lady, 'but that was when some friends of ours were sending wonderful news from Australia, sir, and I believe I did half try to persuade Gilbert to go. His health was very bad, and I thought it might have done him good in all ways.'

'By-the-by,' remarked Gilbert, 'Ackroyd talks of going to Canada.'

'Ackroyd?' said Egremont. 'I'm not surprised to hear that.'

Thyrza had looked at Gilbert anxiously.

'Who told you that?' she asked.

'He told me himself, Thyrza, last night.'

She saw that Egremont was gazing at her; her eyes fell, and she became silent.

Egremont, in the course of the talk, wondered at his position in this little room. He knew that it was one of very few houses in Lambeth in which he could have been at his ease; perhaps there was not another. It seemed to him that he had thrown off a great deal that was artificial in behaviour and in habits of speech, that he had reverted to that self which came to him from his parents, and he felt better for the change. The air of simplicity in the room and its occupants was healthful; of natural refinement there was abundance, only affectation was missing. Would it have been a hardship if his father had failed to amass money, and he had grown up in such a home as this? He knew well enough that by going, say, next door he could pass

into a domestic sphere of a very different kind, to the midst of a life compact of mean slavery, of ignorance, of grossness. This was enormously the exception. But his own home would have been not unlike this. Poverty could not have taken away his birthright of brains, and perhaps some such piece of luck might have fallen to him as had now to Gilbert Grail. Perhaps, too—why not, indeed!—he would have known Thyrza Trent. Certainly he would have seen her by chance here or there in Lambeth, and he—the young workman he might have been—assuredly would not have let her pass and forget her. Why, in that case, perchance he might have——

He had lost himself for a moment. Thyrza was standing before him with a cup of tea; he noticed that the cup shook a little in the saucer.

'Will you have some tea, sir?' she said.

Mrs. Grail had been perturbed somewhat on the question of refreshments. Gilbert decided that to offer a cup of tea would be the best thing; Egremont, he knew, dined late, and would not want anything to eat.

'Thank you, Miss Trent.'

She brought him sugar and milk. This was quite her own idea. 'Some people don't take sugar, some don't take milk; so you ought to let them help themselves to such things.' He took both. She noticed his hand, how shapely it was, how beautiful the finger-nails were. And then he looked at her with a smile of

thanks, not more than of thanks. Could anyone convey thanks more graciously?

'I hope,' Egremont said, turning to Gilbert as he stirred his tea, 'that we shall get our first books on the shelves by the first day of next month.'

Grail made no reply, and all were silent for a little.

The visitor did not remain much longer. To the end he was animated in his talk, making his friends feel as much at their ease as he was himself. When he was about to depart, he said to Thyrza:

'I hope you will have a fine day to-morrow. There is promise of it.'

'Oh, I think it'll be fine,' she replied. 'It would be too cruel if it wasn't!'

Surely—thought Egremont as he smiled—to you if to anyone the sky should show a glad face. How many a time thereafter did he think of those words—'It would be too cruel!' She could not believe that fortune would be unkind to her; she had faith in the undiscovered day.

CHAPTER II.

SEA MUSIC.

Returning to the upper room, Thyrza sat down as if she were very tired.

'No, I don't want anything to eat,' she said to Lydia. 'I shall go to bed at once. We must be up very early in the morning.'

Still she made no preparations. Her mirth and excitement were at an end. Her eyelids drooped heavily, and one of her hands hung down by the side of the chair. Lydia showed no extreme desire for an account of the proceedings below. Yes, Thyrza said, she had enjoyed herself. And presently:

'Mr. Egremont says he wants to begin putting up the books by the first of May.'

'Did he say when the house would be ready?'

Thyrza shook her head. Then

'He told us about foreign countries. He's been everywhere.'

'Gilbert told me he had been to America.'

'Lyddy, is Canada the same as America?'

'I believe it is,' said the other doubtfully. 'I think it is a part. America's a very big country, you know.'

'What do you think Gilbert says? He says Mr. Ackroyd told him last night that he was going to Canada.'

Lydia gave no sign of special interest.

'Is he?'

'I don't think he means it.'

'Perhaps he'll take Totty Nancarrow with him,' remarked Lydia, with a scarcely noticeable touch of irony.

The other did not reply, but she looked pained. Then Lydia declared that she too was weary. They talked little more, though it was a long time before either got to sleep.

The expenses of the journey to Eastbourne were naturally to be paid by Mrs. Ormonde. Thyrza saw Grail in the breakfast hour next morning, and received his advice for the day. He impressed upon her that she must not return by a late train; he had rather, if it were possible, that she should reach London again before dark. Bunce had already conveyed the little box of Bessie's clothing to the hospital; thence Thyrza and the child would go in a cab to Victoria.

She was at the hospital by nine o'clock. Bessie, a weakly, coughing child, who seemingly had but a short term of suffering before her, was at first very reticent with Thyrza, but when they were seated together in the train at Victoria, she brightened in the expectation of renewing her experiences of Mrs. Ormonde's home, and

at length talked freely. Bessie was very old; she had long known the difficulties of a pinched home, and of her own ailments she spoke with a curious gravity as little child-like as could be.

'It's my chest as is weak,' she said. 'The nurse says it'll get stronger as I get older, but it's my belief that it's just the other way about. You never had a weak chest, had you, Miss Trent? You haven't that look. I dessay you're always well; I shouldn't mind if I was the same.' She laughed, and made herself cough. 'I can't see why everybody shouldn't be well. Father says the world's made wrong, and it seems to me that's the truth. Perhaps it looks different to you, Miss Trent.'

'You had better call me Thyrza, Bessie. That's my name.'

'Is it? Well, I don't mind, if you don't. I never knew anybody called Thyrza. But I dessay it's a lady's name. You're a lady, ain't you?'

'No, I'm not a lady. I go to work with Miss Nancarrow. You know her?'

'I can't say as I know her. She lives in the next room to us, but we don't often speak. But I remember now; I've seen you on the stairs.'

'Miss Nancarrow has made friends with your brother and sister whilst you've been in the hospital.'

'Have she now! They didn't tell me about that when they come to see me last time. I suppose things is all upside down. By rights I'd ought to have gone

home for a day or two, just to see that the room was clean. Mrs. Larrop comes in wunst a week, you know, she's a charwoman. But I haven't much trust in her; she's such a one for cat-licking. The children do make such a mess; I always tell them they'd think twice about coming in with dirty shoes if only they had the cleaning to see after.'

Then she began to talk of Mrs. Ormonde, and Thyrza encouraged her to tell all she could about that lady.

'I tell you what, Thyrza,' said Bessie, confidentially, 'when Nelly gets old enough to keep things straight and look after father, do you know what I shall do? I mean to go to Mrs. Ormonde and ask to be took on for a housemaid. That's just what 'ud suit me. My chest ain't so bad when I'm there, and I'd rather be one of Mrs. Ormonde's servants than work anywhere else. But then I perhaps shan't live long enough for that. It's a great thing for carrying people off, is a weak chest.'

Both grew excited as the train neared their destination. Bessie recalled the stations, and here and there an object by the way. It was Thyrza who felt herself the child.

'When shall we see the sea?' she asked.

'Oh, not till we get to the Home. Those hills are called the Downs. Isn't it a funny name, when they all go *up*?'

The Downs were a wonderful sight to Thyrza. Fortune had been kind; it was a delightful spring day,

and on the smooth hillsides floated the shadows of white clouds. She could not speak much, now that every moment brought her nearer to the sea. The Downs were a beginning of vastness. She listened eagerly if, even above the noise of the train, she might catch the sound of great waves.

The train entered the station. Bessie had her head at the window. She drew it back, exclaiming:

'There's Mrs. Ormonde! See, Thyrza! the lady in black!'

Thyrza looked timidly; that lady's face encouraged her. Mrs. Ormonde had seen Bessie, and was soon at the carriage door.

'So here you are again!' was her kindly greeting. 'Why, Bessie, you must have been spending all your time in growing!'

She kissed the child, whose thin face was coloured with pleasure.

'This is Miss Trent, mum,' said Bessie, pointing to her companion, who had descended to the platform. 'She's been so kind as to take care of me.'

Mrs. Ormonde turned quickly round.

'Miss Trent?' She viewed the girl with surprise which she found it impossible to conceal at once. Then she said to Thyrza: 'Are you the young lady of whom I have heard as Mr. Grail's friend?'

'Yes, ma'am,' Thyrza replied modestly.

'Then how glad I am to see you! Come, let us get Bessie's box taken to the carriage.'

Mrs. Ormonde was not of those philanthropists who, in the midst of their well-doing, are preoccupied with the necessity of preserving the distinction between classes. She always fetched the children from the station in her own unpretending carriage. Her business was to make them happy, as the first step to making them well, and whilst they were with her she was their mother. There are plenty of people successfully engaged in reminding the poor of the station to which Providence has called them : the insignificant few who indulge a reckless warmth of heart really cannot be seen to do appreciable harm.

'Mrs. Ormonde, mum,' whispered Bessie, when they were seated in the carriage.

'What is it, Bessie ?'

'Would you take us round by the front road ? Miss Trent hasn't never seen the sea, and she'd like to as soon as she can ; it's only natural.'

Mrs. Ormonde had cast one or two discreet glances at Thyrza. As she did so her smile subdued itself a little ; a grave thought seemed to pass through her mind. She at once gave an order to the coachman in compliance with Bessie's request.

'Mr. Grail is quite well, I hope ?' she said, feeling a singular embarrassment in addressing Thyrza.

Thyrza replied mechanically. To ride in an open carriage with a lady, this alone would have been an agitating experience ; the almost painful suspense with which she waited for the first glimpse of the sea com-

pleted her inability to think or speak with coherence. Her eyes were fixed straight onwards. Mrs. Ormonde continued to observe her, occasionally saying something in a low voice to the child.

The carriage drove to the esplanade, and turned to pass along it in the westerly direction. The tide was at full; a loud surge broke upon the beach; no mist troubled the blue line of horizon. Mrs. Ormonde looked seawards, and her vision found a renewal in sympathy with the thought she had read on Thyrza's face.

You and I cannot remember the moment when the sense of infinity first came upon us; we have thought so much since then, and have assimilated so much of others' thoughts, that those first impressions are become as vague as the memory of our first love. But Thyrza would not forget this vision of the illimitable sea, live how long she might. She had scarcely heretofore been beyond the streets of Lambeth. At a burst her consciousness expanded in a way we cannot conceive. You know that she had no religion, yet now her heart could not contain the new-born worship. Made forgetful of all else by the passionate instinct which ruled her being, she suddenly leaned forward and laid her hand on Mrs. Ormonde's. The latter took and pressed it, smiling kindly.

Bessie, happy in her superior position, looked about her with a satisfied air. She sat with Mrs. Ormonde on the fore-seat; presently she leaned aside

to look westward, and informed Thyrza that the promontory visible before them was Beachy Head. Thyrza had no response to utter.

The carriage turned inland again. Thyrza lost sight of the sea. As if she cared to look at nothing else, her eyes fell.

When they arrived at The Chestnuts, Mrs. Ormonde led her companions to an upper room, where Mrs. Mapper sat talking with two or three children.

'I think Bessie can have her old bed, can't she?' she said, after introducing Thyrza. 'I wonder whether she knows any of our children now? I dare say Miss Trent would like to rest a little.'

A few words were spoken to the matron apart, and Mrs. Ormonde withdrew. Half an hour later, Thyrza, after seeing the children and all that portion of the house which was theirs, was led by Mrs. Mapper to the drawing-room. The lady of the house was there alone; she invited her guest to sit down, and began to talk.

'I am glad you have such a fine day. It will very soon be our dinner-time, then no doubt you will like to go down to the shore.'

Thyrza looked her thanks.

'Poor little Bessie! I wish I could keep her here a long time. But they seem to find it so hard to do without her at home. You know Mr. Bunce very well, I suppose?'

'No, ma'am, I don't. Mr. Grail knows him.'

And Thyrza explained the circumstances that had led to her coming to-day.

'Hasn't he anyone to whom he could look for a little help with the children? I think I must really try and keep Bessie through the summer. Perhaps if I saw Mr. Bunce, when I go to London next week—— So this is really your first day at the seaside?'

She reflected, then said:

'Are you obliged to be home to-night? Couldn't you stay with us till to-morrow?'

Thyrza checked a movement.

'I promised Mr. Grail to be back before dark,' she said.

'Oh, but that will scarcely leave you any time at all. Is there any other need for your return to-day? Suppose I telegraphed to say that I was keeping you—wouldn't Mr. Grail forgive me?'

'I think I might stay, if I could be back to-morrow by tea-time. I must go to work on Monday morning.'

Mrs. Ormonde sighed involuntarily. That work, that work: the consumer of all youth and joy!

'Unfortunately there's no train to-morrow that would help us.'

Thyrza longed to stay; the other could read her face well enough.

'There's an early train on Monday morning,' she continued doubtfully. 'Do you live with parents?'

'Oh, no, ma'am. My parents died a long time ago. I live with my sister. We two have a room to our-

selves; it's in the same house where Mr. Grail lives: that's how I got to know him.'

'And is your sister older than yourself?'

'Yes, ma'am; four years older. Her name's Lydia. We've always kept together. When I'm married, she's coming to live with us.'

Mrs. Ormonde listened with ever deepening interest. She formed a picture of that elder sister. The words 'We've always kept together,' touched her inexpressibly; they bore so beautiful a meaning on Thyrza's lips.

'And would your sister Lydia scold me very much if I made you lose your Monday morning's work?' she asked, smiling.

'Oh, it's always the other way, ma'am. Lyddy's always glad when I get a holiday. But I never like her to have to go to work alone.'

'Well now, I shall telegraph to Lyddy, and then to-morrow I shall write a letter to her and beg her to forgive me. If I do so, do you think you could stay?'

'I—I think so, ma'am.'

'And Mr. Grail?'

'He's just as kind to me as Lyddy is.'

'Then I think we won't be afraid. The telegram shall go at once, so that if there were real need for your return, they would have time to reply.'

The message despatched, they talked till dinner-time. Fulfilment of joy soon put an end to Thyrza's embarrassment; she told all about her life and Lydia's, about their work, about Mr. Boddy, about Gilbert and

his books. Mrs. Ormonde led her gently on, soothed by the music.

That day Mrs. Ormonde took a seat with the children in the dining-room into which Egremont had peeped. She sat at one end of the table, Mrs. Mapper at the other. Bessie had already made a friend with whom she could discuss grave matters, such as weakness of the chest—poor child!—and the difficulty of managing younger brothers and sisters. Thyrza was not called upon to converse much. At every moment she was receiving new impressions. Were all real ladies like Mrs. Ormonde? Were all real gentlemen like Mr. Egremont? This was a wonderful world into which she had been exalted.

She did not forget Lyddy. Lyddy had not left work yet, and perhaps had some engagement for the Saturday afternoon, which would bring in another shilling. What talking when she got back!

Mrs. Ormonde decided to drive with Thyrza to the top of Beachy Head; on the morrow the sky might not be so favourable to the view. The children would go out in the usual way; she preferred to be alone with her visitor for a while.

'Will they have the telegraph yet?' Thyrza asked, as she again seated herself in the carriage.

'Oh, long since. We could have had an answer before now.'

Thyrza sighed with contentment, for she knew that Lyddy was glad on her behalf.

So now the keen breath of the sea folded her about and made warmth through her whole body; it sang in her ears, the eternal sea music which to infinite generations of mortals has been an inspiring joy. Upward, upward, on the long sweep of the climbing road, whilst landward the horizon retired from curve to curve off the wild Downs, and on the other hand a dark edge against the sky made fearful promise of precipitous shore. The great snow-mountains of heaven moved grandly on before the west wind, ever changing outline, meeting to incorporate mass with mass, sundering with magic softness and silence. The bay of Pevensey spread with graceful line its white fringe of breakers now low upon the strand, far away to the cliffs of Hastings.

'Hastings!' Thyrza exclaimed, when Mrs. Ormonde had mentioned the name. 'Is that where the battle of Hastings was?'

'A little further inland. You have read of that?'

'Gilbert—Mr. Grail is teaching me history. Yes, I know about Hastings.'

'And what country do you think you would come to, if you went right over the sea yonder?'

'That must be—really?—where William the Conqueror came from? That was Normandy, in France.'

'Yes, France is over there.'

'France? France?'

No, it was too hard to believe. She murmured the name to herself. Gilbert had shown it her on the map,

but how difficult to transfer that dry symbol into this present reality!

'Have you ever been to France, Mrs. Ormonde?'

'Yes, I have seen France.'

They left the carriage near the coastguard's house, and walked forward to the brow of the great cliffs. Mrs. Ormonde took Thyrza's hand as they drew near. They stood there for a long time.

Two or three other people were walking about the Head. In talking, Mrs. Ormonde became aware that someone had approached her; she turned her head, and saw Annabel Newthorpe.

They shook hands quietly. Thyrza drew a little away.

'Are you alone?' Mrs. Ormonde asked.

'Yes, I have walked.'

'Who do you think this is?' Mrs. Ormonde murmured quickly. 'Mr. Grail's future wife. She has just brought one of my children down; I am going to keep her till Monday. Come and speak; the most loveable child!'

Thyrza and Annabel were presented to each other with the pleasant informality which Mrs. Ormonde so naturally employed. Each was impressed with the other's beauty; Thyrza felt not a little awe, and Annabel could not gaze enough at the lovely face which made such a surprise for her.

'Why did Mr. Egremont give me no suggestion of this?' she said to herself.

She had noticed, in drawing near, how intimately her friend and the stranger were talking together. Her arrival had disturbed Thyrza's confidence; she herself did not feel able to talk quite freely. So in a few minutes she said:

'I must make my way homewards. Good-bye, Miss Trent.'

'But let us take you in the carriage,' urged Mrs. Ormonde.

'I'd rather walk, thank you. It's my daily discipline, you know; it does me good.'

So Annabel turned and went by the footway along the edge of the height. Just before descending into a hollow which would hide her, she cast a look back, and saw that Thyrza's eyes were following her.

'But how could he speak of her and yet tell me nothing?'

His delicacy explained it, no doubt. He had not liked to say of the simple girl whom Grail was to marry that she was very beautiful. Annabel felt that most men would have been less scrupulous; it was characteristic of Egremont to feel a subtle propriety of that kind.

Annabel was at all times disposed to interpret Egremont's motives in a higher sense than would apply to the average man.

On her return, Thyrza had tea with Mrs. Mapper and the children, then went with them to the large room upstairs in which evenings were spent till the

early bedtime. It was an ideal nursery, with abundant picture-books, with toys, with everything that could please a child's eye and engage a child's mind. There was a piano, and on this Mrs. Mapper sometimes played the kind of music that children would like. She taught them songs, moreover, and a singing evening was always much looked forward to. Saturday was always such; when the little choir had got a song perfect, Mrs. Ormonde was wont to come up and hear them sing it, making them glad with her praise.

It happened that to-night there was to be practising of a new song; Mrs. Mapper had chosen 'Annie Laurie,' and she began by playing over the air. One or two of the children knew it, but not the words; these, it was found, were always very quickly learnt by singing a verse a few times over.

'Do you know "Annie Laurie," Miss Trent?' Mrs. Mapper asked.

It was one of old Mr. Boddy's favourites; Thyrza had sung it to him since she was seven years old.

'Let us sing it together then, will you?'

They began. Thyrza was already thoroughly at home, and this music was an unexpected delight. After a line or two, Mrs. Mapper's voice sank. Thyrza stopped and looked inquiringly, meeting a wonder in the other's eyes. Mrs. Mapper was a woman of much prudence; she merely said:

'I find I've got a little cold. Would you mind singing it alone?'

So Thyrza sang the song through. A moment or two of quietness followed.

'Now I think you'll soon know it, children,' said Mrs. Mapper. 'Lizzie Smith, I see you've got it already. Miss Trent will be kind enough to sing the first verse again; you sing with her, Lizzie—and you too, Mary. That's a clever girl! Now we shall get on.'

The practising went on till all were able to join in fairly well. After that, Mrs. Mapper played the favourite dance tunes, and the children danced merrily. Whilst they were so enjoying themselves, Mrs. Ormonde came into the room. She had dined, and wanted Thyrza to come and sit with her, for she was alone. But first she had five minutes of real laughter and play with the children. They loved her, every one of them, and clung to her desperately when she said she could stay no longer.

'Good-bye!' she said, waving her hand at the door.

'No, no!' cried several voices. 'There's "good-night" yet, Mrs. Ormonde!'

'Why, of course there is,' she laughed; 'but that's no reason why I shouldn't say good-bye.'

She took Thyrza's hand and led her down.

'You shall have some supper with me afterwards,' she said. 'The little ones have theirs now; but it's too early for you.'

If the drawing-room had been a marvel to Thyrza in the daylight, it was yet more so now that she entered it and found two delicately shaded lamps giving

a rich uncertainty to all the beautiful forms of furniture and ornaments. She had thought the Grails' parlour luxurious. And the dear old easy-chair, now so familiar to her, how humble it was compared with this in which Mrs. Ormonde seated her! These wonders caused her no envy or uneasy desire. In looking at a glorious altar-piece, one does not feel unhappy because one cannot carry it off from the church and hang it up at home. Thyrza's mood was purely of admiration, and of joy in being deemed worthy to visit such scenes. And all the time she kept saying to herself, 'Another whole day! I shall be by the sea again to-morrow! I shall sleep and wake close by the sea!'

Presently Mrs. Ormonde had to absent herself for a few minutes.

'You heard what the children said about "good-night." I always go and see them as soon as they are tucked up in bed. I don't think they'd sleep if I missed.'

The kind office over, she spoke with Mrs. Mapper about the evening's singing.

'Did you know,' the latter asked, 'what a voice Miss Trent has?'

'She sings? I didn't know.'

'I was so delighted that I had to stop singing myself. I'm sure it's a wonderful voice.'

'Indeed! I must ask her to sing to me.'

She found Thyrza turning over the leaves of a volume of photographs. Without speaking, she sat

down at the piano, and began to play gently the air of 'Annie Laurie.' Thyrza looked up, and then came nearer.

'You are fond of music?' said Mrs. Ormonde.

'Very fond. How beautiful your playing is!'

'To-morrow you shall hear Miss Newthorpe play; her's is much better. Will you sing this for me?'

When it was sung, she asked what other songs Thyrza knew. They were all, of course, such as the people sing; some of them Mrs. Ormonde did not know at all, but to others she was able to play an accompaniment. Her praise was limited to a few kind words. On leaving the piano, she was thoughtful.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Mapper came to conduct Thyrza to her bedroom.

'We have breakfast at half-past eight to-morrow,' Mrs. Ormonde said.

'If I am up in time,' Thyrza asked, 'may I go out before breakfast?'

'Do just as you like, my dear,' the other answered, with a smile. 'I want you to enjoy your visit.'

In spite of the strangeness of her room, and of the multitude of thoughts and feelings to which the day had given birth, Thyrza was not long awake. She passed into a dreamland where all she had newly learnt was reproduced and glorified. But the rising sun had not to wait long for the opening of her eyes. She sprang from bed and to the window, whence, however,

she could only see the tall chestnuts and a neighbouring cottage. The day was again fine; she dressed with nervous speed—there was no Lyddy to do her hair, for the very first time in her life—then went softly forth on to the landing. No one seemed to be stirring: she had no watch to tell her the time, but doubtless it was very early. Softly she began to descend the stairs, and at length recognised the door of the drawing-room. She did not like to enter; it was only Mrs. Ormonde's kindness that had given her a right to sit there the evening before. But the house-door would not be open yet, she feared. Just as she was reluctantly turning to go up and wait a little longer in her bedroom, a sound below at once startled and relieved her. Looking over the banisters, she saw a servant coming from one of the rooms on the ground floor. She hurried down. The servant looked at her with surprise.

'Good-morning!' she said. 'Can I get out of the house?'

'I'll open the door for you, Miss.'

'What time is it, please?'

'It isn't quite half-past six, Miss. You're an early riser.'

'Yes, I want to go out before breakfast. Please will you tell me which way goes to the sea?'

The servant gave her good-natured directions, and Thyrza was soon running along with a glimpse of blue horizon for guidance. She ran like a child, ran till the sharp morning air made her breathless, then walked

until she was able to run again. And at length she was on the beach, down at length by the very edge of the waves. Here the breeze was so strong that with difficulty she stood against it, but its rude caresses were a joy to her. Each breaker seemed a living thing; now she approached timidly, now ran back with a delicious fear. She filled her hands with the smooth sea-pebbles; a trail of weed with the foam fresh on it was a great discovery. Then her eye caught a far-off line of smoke. That must be a steamer coming from a foreign country; perhaps from France, which was—how believe it?—yonder across the blue vast.

You have watched with interest some close-folded bud; one day all promise is shut within those delicate sepals, and on the next, for the fulness of time has come, you find the very flower with its glow and its perfume. So it sometimes happens that a human soul finds its season, and at a touch expands to wonderful new life.

Mrs. Ormonde perceived at breakfast that Thyrza desired nothing more than to be left to pass her day in freedom. So she gave her visitor a little bag with provision against seaside appetite, and let her go forth till dinner-time; then again till the hour of tea. In the evening Thyrza was again bidden to the drawing-room. She found Miss Newthorpe there.

'Come now, and tell us what you have been doing all day long,' Mrs. Ormonde said. 'Why, the sun and the wind have already touched your cheeks!'

'I have enjoyed myself,' Thyrza replied, quickly, seating herself near her new friend.

She could give little more description than that. Annabel talked with her, and presently, at Mrs. Ormonde's request, went to the piano. When the first notes had sounded, Thyrza let her head droop a little. Music such as this she had not imagined. When Annabel came back to her seat, she gazed at her, admiring and loving.

'Now will you sing us "Annie Laurie"?' said Mrs. Ormonde. 'I'll play for you.'

'What is that child's future?' Mrs. Ormonde asked of Annabel, when Thyrza had left them together.

'Not a sad one, I think,' said Annabel, musingly. 'Happily, her husband will not be an untaught working man.'

'No, thank goodness for that! I suppose they will be married in two or three weeks. Her voice is a beautiful thing lost.'

'We won't grieve over that. Her own happiness is of more account. I do wish father could have seen her!'

'Oh, she must come to us again some day. Your father would have alarmed her too much. Haven't you felt all the time as if she were something very delicate, something to be carefully guarded against shocks and hazards? As I saw her from my window going out of the garden this morning, I felt a sort of

fear; I was on the point of sending a servant to keep watch over her from a distance.'

There was a silence, then Mrs. Ormonde murmured:

'I wonder whether she is in love with him?'

Annabel smiled, but said nothing.

'She told me that he is very kind to her. "Just as kind as Lyddy," she said. Indeed, who wouldn't be?'

'We have every reason to think highly of Mr. Grail,' Annabel remarked. 'He must be as exceptional in his class as she is.'

'Yes. But the exceptional people——'

Annabel looked inquiringly.

'Never mind! The world has beautiful things in it, and one of the most beautiful is hope.'

CHAPTER III.

ADRIFT.

It was partly out of kindness to Thyrza that Totty Nancarrow had changed her mind about going to Eastbourne. Having seen her and mentioned the matter, Totty saw at once how eagerly Thyrza would accept such a chance. But it happened that within the same hour she saw Luke Ackroyd, and Luke had proposed a meeting on Saturday afternoon. Totty had no extreme desire to meet him, and yet—perhaps she might as well. He talked of going up the river to Battersea Park, as the weather was so fine.

So at three on Saturday, Totty stood by the landing-stage at Lambeth. In fact, she was there at least five minutes before the appointed time. But her punctuality was wasted. Ten minutes past three by Lambeth parish church, and no Mr. Ackroyd.

'Well, I call this nice!' Totty exclaimed to herself. 'Let him come now if he likes; he won't find *me* waiting for him. And a lot I care!'

She went off humming a tune and swinging her hands. On the Embankment she met a girl she knew.

They went on into Westminster Bridge Road, and there came across another friend. It was decided that they should all go and have tea at Totty's. And before they reached Newport Street, yet another friend joined them. The more the merrier! Totty delighted in packing her tiny room as full as it would hold. She ran into Mrs. Bower's for a pot of jam. Who more mirthful now than Totty Nancarrow!

With subdued gossip and laughter all ran up the narrow staircase and into Totty's room. A fire had first of all to be lit; Totty was a deft hand at that; not a girl in Lambeth could start a blaze and have her kettle boiling in sharper time on a cold dark morning. But, after all, there would not be bread enough. Tilly Roach would be off for that. 'Mind you bring the over-weight!' the others screamed after her, and some current joke seemed to be involved in the injunction, for at once they all laughed as only work-girls can.

Tilly was back in no time. She was a little, slim girl, with the palest and shortest of gold hair, and a pretty face spoilt with freckles. As at all times, she had her pocket full of sweets, and ate them incessantly. As a rule, Tilly cannot have eaten less than a couple of pounds of lollipops every week, and doubtless would have consumed more had her pocket-money allowed it. The second of Totty's guests was Annie West, whom you know already, for she was at the 'friendly lead' when Thyrza sang; she was something of a scapegrace,

constantly laughed in a shrill note, and occasionally had to be called to order. The third was a Mrs. Allchin, aged fifteen, a married woman of two months' date; her hair was cut across her forehead, she wore large eardrops, and over her jacket hung a necklace with a silver locket. Mrs. Allchin, called by her intimates 'Loo,' had the air of importance which became her position.

There were only two chairs in the room; the table had to be placed so that the bed could serve for sitting. Tablecloth there was none: when friends did her the honour of coming to tea, Totty spread a newspaper. The tea-service was, to say the least, primitive; four cups there were, but only two saucers survived, and a couple of teaspoons had to be shared harmoniously. No one ever gave a thought to such trifles at Totty Nancarrow's.

Whilst the kettle boiled, Annie West provided diversion of a literary kind. She had recently purchased a little book in cover of yellow paper, which, for the sum of one penny, purported to give an exhaustive description of 'Charms, Spells, and Incantations': on the back was the picture of a much-bejewelled Moorish maiden, with eyes thrown up in prophetic ecstasy: above ran the legend, 'Wonderfully mysterious and peculiar.' The work included, moreover, 'a splendid selection of the best love songs.'

'It's cheap at a penny,' was Miss West's opinion.

She began by reading out an infallible charm for

the use of maidens who would see in dreams their future husband. It was the 'Nine-key Charm.'

'Get nine small keys, they must all be your own by begging or purchase (borrowing will not do, nor must you tell what you want them for), plait a three-plaited band of your own hair, and tie them together, fastening the ends with nine knots. Fasten them with one of your garters to your left wrist on going to bed, and bind the other garter round your head; then say:

> St. Peter, take it not amiss,
> To try your favour I've done this.
> You are the ruler of the keys,
> Favour me, then, if you please;
> Let me then your influence prove,
> And see my dear and wedded love.

This must be done on the eve of St. Peter's, and is an old charm used by the maidens of Rome in ancient times, who put great faith in it.'

'When is the eve of St. Peter's?' asked Tilly Roach. 'Totty, you're a Catholic, you ought to know.'

'Don't bother me with your rubbish!' cried Totty.

'It ain't rubbish at all,' retorted Annie West. 'Now didn't you see your husband, Loo, with a card charm before you'd ever really set eyes on him?'

'Course I did,' assented Mrs. Allchin, aged fifteen.

'Here's another book I'm going to get,' pursued Annie, referring to an advertisement on the cover. 'It tells you no end of things—see here! "How to

bewitch your enemies," "How to render yourself invisible," "How to grow young again," "How to read sealed letters," "How to see at long distances," and heaps more. "Price one and sixpence, or, post free, twenty stamps." '

'Don't be a fool and waste your money!' was Totty's uncompromising advice. 'It's only sillies believes things like that.'

'Totty ain't no need of charms!' piped Tilly, with sweets in her mouth. 'She knows who *she's* going to marry.'

'Do I, miss?' Totty exclaimed, scornfully. 'Do you know as much for yourself, I wonder?'

'O, Tilly's a-going to marry the p'liceman with red hair as stands on the Embankment!' came from Mrs. Allchin; whereupon followed inextinguishable laughter.

But they were determined to tease Totty, and began to talk from one to the other about Luke Ackroyd, not mentioning his name, but using signs and symbols.

'If you two wait for husbands till I'm married,' said Totty at length to the laughing girls, 'you've a good chance to die old maids. I prefer to keep my earnings for my own spending, thank you.'

'When's Thyrza Trent going to be married?' asked Mrs. Allchin. 'Do you know, Totty?'

'In about a fortnight, I think.'

'Is the bands put up?'

'They're going to be married at the Registry Office.'

'Well, I never!' cried Annie West. 'You wouldn't catch me doing without a proper wedding! I suppose that's why Thyrza won't talk about it. But I believe he's a rum sort of man, isn't he?'

Nobody could reply from personal acquaintance with Gilbert Grail. Totty did not choose to give her opinion.

'I say,' she exclaimed, 'we've had enough about marriages. Tilly, make yourself useful, child, and cut some bread.'

For a couple of hours at least gossip was unintermittent. Then Mrs. Allchin declared that her husband would be 'making a row' if she stayed from home any later. Tilly Roach took leave at the same time. Totty and Miss West chatted a little longer, then put on their hats to have a ramble in Lambeth Walk.

They had not gone many paces from the house when they were overtaken by some one, who said:

'Totty! I want to speak to you.'

Totty would not look round. It was Ackroyd's voice.

'I say, Totty!'

But she walked on. Ackroyd remained on the edge of the pavement. In a minute or two he saw that Miss Nancarrow was coming towards him unaccompanied.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' she said. 'What do you want, Mr. Ackroyd?'

'Why didn't you come this afternoon?'

'Well, I like that! Why didn't *you* come?'

'I was a bit late. I really couldn't help it, Totty. Did you go away before I came?'

'Why, of course I did. How long was I to wait?'

'I'm very sorry. Let's go somewhere now. I've been waiting about for more than an hour on the chance of seeing you.'

He mentioned the chief music-hall of the neighbourhood.

'I don't mind,' said Totty. 'But I can't go beyond sixpence.'

'Oh, all right! I'll see to that.'

'No, you won't. I pay for myself, or I don't go at all. That's my rule.'

'As you like.'

The place of entertainment was only just open; they went in with a crowd of people and found seats. The prevailing odours of the hall were stale beer and stale tobacco; the latter was speedily freshened by the fumes from pipes. Ackroyd ordered a glass of beer, and deposited it on a little ledge before him, an arrangement similar to that for different purposes in a church pew; Totty would have nothing.

Ackroyd had changed a good deal during the last few months. The coarser elements of his face had acquired a disagreeable prominence, and when he laughed, as he did constantly, the sound lacked the old genuineness. To-night he was evidently trying hard

to believe that he enjoyed the music-hall entertainment; in former days he would have dismissed anything of the kind with a few contemptuous words. When the people about him roared at imbecilities unspeakable, he threw back his head and roared with them; when they stamped, he raised as much dust as any one. Totty had no need to affect amusement; she was not without suspicion that everything was intensely stupid and hideously vulgar, she knew that Thyza Trent would never have sat through it, yet her tendency to laughter was such that very little sufficed to keep her in the carelessly merry frame of mind which agreed with her, and on the whole it was not disagreeable to be sitting by Luke Ackroyd; she glanced at him surreptitiously at times.

He drank two or three glasses of beer, then felt a need of stronger beverage. Totty remonstrated with him; he laughed, and drank on out of boastfulness. At length Totty would countenance it no longer; after a useless final warning, she left her place and pressed through the crowd to the door. Ackroyd sprang up and followed her. His face was flushed, and grew more so in the sudden night air.

'What's the matter?' he said, putting his arm through the girl's. 'You're not going to leave me in that way, Totty? Well, let's walk about then.'

'Look here, Mr. Ackroyd,' began Totty, 'I'm surprised at you! It ain't like a man of your kind to go muddling his head night after night, in this way.'

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'I know that as well as you do, Totty. See!' He made her stop, and added in a lower voice, 'Say you'll marry me, and I'll stop it from to-night.'

'I've told you already I shan't do nothing of the kind. So don't be silly! You can be sensible enough if you like, and then I can get along well enough with you.'

'Very well, then I'll drink for another week, and then be off to Canada.'

'You'd better go at once, I should think.'

She had moved a little apart from him. Just then a half-drunken fellow came along the pavement, and in a freak caught Totty about the waist. Ackroyd was in the very mood for a gentleman of this kind. In an instant he had planted so direct a blow that the fellow staggered back into the gutter, Totty with difficulty preventing herself from being dragged with him. The thoroughfare was crowded, street urchins ran together with yells of anticipatory delight, and maturer loafers formed the wonted ring even before the man assaulted had recovered himself. Then came the play of fists; Ackroyd from the first had far the best of it, but the other managed to hold his ground.

And the result of it was that in something less than a quarter of an hour from his leaving the music-hall, Ackroyd found himself on the way to the police-station, his adversary following in the care of a second constable, all the way loudly accusing him of being the assailant.

Totty walked in the rear of the crowd; she had been frightened by the scene of violence, and there were

marks of tears on her cheeks. She entered the station, eager to get a hearing for a plain story. Ackroyd turned and saw her.

'It's no good saying anything now,' he said to her. 'This blackguard has plenty more lies ready. Go to the house and tell my brother-in-law, will you? I dare say he'll come and be bail.'

She went at once, and ran all the way to Paradise Street, so that when in reply to her knock Mrs. Poole appeared at the door, she had to wait yet a moment before her breath would suffice for speaking. She did not know Mrs. Poole.

'I've got a message from Mr. Ackroyd for Mr. Poole,' she said.

The other was alarmed.

'What's happened now?' she inquired. 'I'm Mrs. Poole, Mr. Ackroyd's sister.'

Totty lowered her voice, and explained rapidly what had come to pass. Mrs. Poole eyed her throughout with something more than suspicion.

'And who may you be, if you please?' she asked at the end.

'I'm Miss Nancarrow.'

'I'm not much wiser. Thank you. I'll let Mr. Poole know.'

She closed the door. Totty, thus unceremoniously shut out, turned away; she felt miserable, and the feeling was so strange to her that before she had gone many steps she again began to cry. She had under-

stood well enough the thought expressed in Mrs. Poole's face; it was gratuitous unkindness, and just now she was not prepared for it. There was much of the child in her still, for all her years of independence in the highways and by-ways of Lambeth, and, finding it needful to cry, she let her tears have free course, only now and then dashing the back of her hand against the corner of her lips as she walked on. Why should the woman be so ready to think evil of her? She had done nothing whatever to deserve it, nothing; she had kept herself a good girl, for all that she lived alone and liked to laugh. At another time most likely she would have cared something less than a straw for Mrs. Poole's opinion of her, but just now—somehow—well, she didn't know quite how it was. Why would Luke keep on drinking in that way, and oblige her to run out of the music-hall? It was his fault, the foolish fellow. But he had been quick enough to defend her; a girl would not find it amiss to have that arm always at her service. And in the meantime he was in the police cell.

Mrs. Poole, excessively annoyed, went down to the kitchen. Her husband sat in front of the fire, a long clay pipe at his lips, his feet very wide apart on the fender; up on the high mantelpiece stood a half finished glass of beer. Though he still held the pipe, he was nodding; as his wife entered, his head fell very low.

'Jim!' exclaimed his wife, as if something had been added to her annoyance.

'Eh? Well, Jane?—eh?'

'Then you *will* set your great feet on the fender! The minute I turn my back, of course! If you're too lazy to take your boots off, you must keep your heels under the chair. I won't have my fender scratched, so I tell you!'

He was a large-headed man, sleepy in appearance at the best of times, but enormously good-natured. He bent down in a startled way to see if his boots had really done any harm.

'Well, well, I won't do it again, Jenny,' he mumbled.

'Of course, I wonder how often you've said that. As it happens, it's as well you have got your boots on still. There's a girl o' some kind just come to say as Luke's locked up for fightin' in the street. He sent for you to bail him out.'

'Why, there! Tut-tut-tut! What a fellow that is! Fightin'? Why now, didn't I tell him this afternoon as he looked like pickin' a quarrel wi' somebody? But, I say, Jane, it's a low-life kind o' thing for to go a-fightin' in the streets.'

'Of course it is. What'll he come to next, I wonder? The sooner he gets off to Canada, the better, I sh'd say. But he'll not go; he talks an' talks, an' it's all just for showin' off.'

Mr. Poole had risen.

'Bail? Why, I don't know nothin' about bail, Jane? How d'you do it? I hadn't never nothing to do with folks as got locked up.'

'I don't suppose you never had, Jim, till now.'

'Nay, hang it, Jenny, I wasn't for alludin' to that! Give me my coat. How much money have we in the house? I've sixpence 'apenny i' my pocket.'

'It ain't done with money; you'll have to sign something, I think.'

'All right. But I'll read it first, though. Who was it as come, did you say?'

'Nay, I don't know. She called herself Miss Nancarrow. I didn't care to have much to say to her.'

Mrs. Poole was a kindly disposed woman, but, like her average sisters, found charity hard when there was ever so slight an appearance against another of her sex. We admire this stalwart virtue, you and I, reverencing public opinion; all the same, charity has something to be said for it.

'Miss Nancarrow, eh?' said Poole, dragging on his big overcoat. 'Don't know her. Kennington Road station is it?'

'You'd better finish your beer, Jim.'

'So I will. Have a bit o' supper ready for the lad.'

Totty walked as far as the police-station. She could not bring herself to enter and make inquiries; that look of Mrs. Poole's would be hard to bear on men's faces. Her tears were dry now; she stood reading the notices on the board. A man had deserted his wife and left her chargeable to the parish; there was a reward for his apprehension. 'That's the woman's

fault,' Totty said to herself. 'She's made his home miserable for him. If I had a husband, I don't think he'd want to run away from *me*. If he did, well, I should say, "good riddance." Catch me setting the p'lice after him!' The body of a child had been found; a woman answering to a certain description was wanted. 'Poor thing!' thought Totty. 'She's more likely to pity than to blame. They shouldn't take her if I could help it.' So she commented on each notice, in accordance with her mood.

It was very cold. She had no gloves on, and her hands were getting quite numb. Would Mr. Poole answer the summons. If not, Luke would, she supposed, remain in the cell all night. It would be cold enough *there*, poor fellow!

She had waited about twenty minutes, when a large-headed man in a big overcoat came up, and, after eyeing the edifice from roof to pavement, ascended the steps and entered.

'I shouldn't wonder if that's him,' murmured Totty. And she waited anxiously.

In a quarter of an hour, the man appeared again, and after him came—oh yes, it was Luke! He had his eyes on the ground. The rescuer put his arm in Luke's, and they walked off together.

He had not seen her, and she was disappointed. She followed at a short distance behind them. The large-headed man spoke occasionally, but Ackroyd seemed to make brief reply, if any. Their way took

them along Walnut Tree Walk; Totty saw that, in passing the house where Lydia and Thyrza lived, Luke cast a glance at the upper windows; probably he knew nothing of Thyrza's absence at Eastbourne. They turned into Lambeth Walk, then again into Paradise Street, Totty still a little distance in the rear. At their house, they paused. Luke seemed to be going further on, and, to the girl's surprise, he did so, whilst Mr. Poole entered.

He turned to the left, this time into Newport Street. Totty felt a strange tightness at her chest, for all at once she guessed what his purpose was.

It was still only half-past ten; people were moving about. Newport Street has only one inhabited side; the other is formed by the railway viaduct, the arches of which are boarded up and made to serve for stables, warehouses, workshops. Moreover, the thoroughfare is very badly lighted; on the railway side one can walk along at night-time without risk of recognition. Totty availed herself of this gloom, and kept nearly opposite to Luke. He stopped before her house, hesitated, was about to approach the door. Then Totty—no stranger being near—called softly across the street:

'Mr. Ackroyd!'

He turned at once, and came over.

'Why, is that you?' he said. 'What are you doing there, Totty?'

'Oh, nothing. So they've let you go?'

She spoke indifferently. It had been on her tongue

to say that she had followed from the police-station, but the other words came instead.

'I shall have to turn up on Monday morning,' Luke replied.

'What a shame! Did they keep that man?'

'Yes. They kept us both. He kept swearing I'd an old grudge against him, and that he'd done nothing at all. The blackguard had the impudence to charge me with assault; so I charged him too. Then that constable said he'd had us both in charge before for drunk and disorderly. Altogether, it wasn't a bad lying-match.'

'Why do you run the chance of getting into such rows?'

'Well, I like that, Totty! Was I to let him insult you, and just stand by?'

'Oh, I don't mean that. But it wouldn't have happened at all but for you going on drinking—you know that very well, Mr. Ackroyd.'

'I suppose it wouldn't. It doesn't matter. I just wanted to see you'd got home all right. Good-night!'

'Good-night! Mind *you* get home safe, that's all.'

She turned away. He turned away. But he was back before she had crossed the street.

'I say, Totty!'

'What is it?'

'You haven't told me what you were doing, standing here.'

'I don't see as it matters to you, Mr. Ackroyd.'

'No, I suppose it doesn't. Well, good-night!'

'Good-night!'

Each again turned to depart; again Ackroyd came back.

'Totty!'

'What *is* it, Mr. Ackroyd?' she exclaimed, fretfully.

'I can't for the life of me make out what you were doing standing there.'

'I don't see as it's any business of yours, Mr. Ackroyd.'

'Still, I'd rather you told me. I suppose you were waiting for somebody?'

'If you *must* know—yes, I was.'

'H'm, I thought so. Well, I won't stop to be in the way.'

'I say, Mr. Ackroyd!'

'Yes?'

'There's a notice outside the station as says a man has deserted his wife.'

'Is there? How do you know?'

'I read it.'

'Oh, you've been waiting there, have you?'

'And another thing. It wasn't no use you looking up at Thyrza Trent's window. She's away.'

'How do you know I looked up?'

He came nearer, a smile on his face. Totty averted her eyes.

'I suppose it wasn't me you were waiting for, Totty?'

She said nothing.

'Give me a kiss, Totty.'

'I'm sure I shan't, Mr. Ackroyd!'

'Then let me take one.'

She made no resistance.

'When, Totty?' he whispered, drawing her near.

'Next Christmas, if you haven't taken a drop too much before then. If I find out you *have*—it's no good you coming after Totty Nancarrow.'

She walked with him to the end of the street, then watched him to his house. She was pleased; she was ashamed; she was afraid. Turning to go home, she crossed herself and murmured something.

CHAPTER IV.

DRAWING NEARER.

Lydia had a little rule of self-discipline which deserved to be, and was, its own reward. If ever personal troubles began to worry her she diligently bent her thoughts upon someone for whose welfare she was anxious, and whom she might possibly aid. The rule had to submit to an emphatic exception ; the person to be thought of must be any one *save* that particular one whose welfare she especially desired, and whom she might perchance have aided if she had made a great endeavour. However, the rule itself had become established long before this exception was dreamt of. Formerly she was wont to occupy her mind with Thyrza. Now that her sister seemed all but beyond need of anxious guarding, and that the necessity for applying the rule was greater than ever before, Lydia gave her attention to Mr. Boddy.

The old man had not borne the winter very well ; looking at him, Lydia could not help observing that he stooped more than was his habit, and that his face was more drawn. He did his best to put a bright aspect on

things when he talked with her, but there were signs that he found it increasingly difficult to obtain sufficient work. A few months ago she would have had no scruple in speaking freely on the subject to Mary Bower, or even to Mrs. Bower, and so learning from them whether the old man paid his rent regularly and had enough food. But from Mary she was estranged—it seemed as if hopelessly—and Mrs. Bower had of late been anything but cordial when Lydia went to the shop. The girl observed that Mr. Boddy was now never to be found seated in the back parlour: she always had to go up to his room. She could not bring herself to mention this to him, or indeed to say anything that would suggest her coolness with the Bowers. Still, it was all tacitly understood, and it made things very uncomfortable.

She was still angry with Mary. Every night she chid herself for doing what she had never done before—for nourishing unkindness. She shed many tears in secret. But forgiveness would not grow in her heart. She thought not seldom of the precepts she had heard at chapel, and—curiously—they by degrees separated themselves from her individual resentment; much she desired to make them her laws, for they seemed beautiful to her conscience. Could she but receive that Christian spirit it would be easy to go to Mary and say, 'I have been wrong; forgive me!' The day was not yet come.

So she had to turn over plans for helping the poor

old man who long ago had so helped her and Thyrza. Of course she thought of the possibility of his coming to live in Thyrza's house; yet how propose that? Thyrza had so much to occupy her; it was not wonderful that she took for granted Mr. Boddy's well-being. And would it be justifiable to impose a burden of this kind upon the newly-married pair. To be sure she could earn enough to pay for the little that Mr. Boddy needed. Thyrza had almost angrily rejected the idea that her sister should pay rent in the new house; payment for board she would only accept because Lydia declared that if it were not accepted she would live elsewhere. So there would remain a margin for the old man's needs. But his presence in the house was the difficulty. It might be very inconvenient, and in any case such a proposal ought to come from Gilbert first of all. The old man, moreover, was very sensitive on the point involved; such a change would have to be brought about with every delicacy. Still, it must come to that before long.

Perhaps the best would be to wait until Thyrza was actually married, and discover how the household arrangements worked. Thyrza herself would then perhaps notice the old man's failing strength.

Lydia went to see him on Sunday afternoon. The bright day suggested to her that she should take him out for a walk. She had waited until Mary would be away at the school. Mr. Bower lay on the sofa snoring; the after-smell of roast beef and cabbage was

heavy in the air of the room. Mrs. Bower would have also slept but for the necessity of having an eye to the shop, which was open on Sunday as on other days; her drowsiness made her irritable, and she only muttered as Lydia went through to the staircase. Lydia had come this way for the sake of appearances; she resolved that on the next occasion she would ring Mr. Boddy's bell at the side door. Upstairs, the old man was reading his thumbed Bible. He never went to a place of worship, but read the Bible on Sunday without fail.

He was delighted to go out into the sunshine.

'And when did the little one get back?' he asked, as he drew out his overcoat—the Christmas gift—from a drawer in which it was carefully folded.

'Why, what do you think! She won't be back till to-morrow. Yesterday, when I got back from work, there was a telegraph waiting for me. It was from the lady at Eastbourne, Mrs. Ormonde, and just said she was going to keep Thyrza till Monday, because it would do her good. How she will be enjoying herself!'

They left the house by the private door and went in the direction of the river. Lydia ordinarily walked at a good pace; now she accommodated her steps to those of her companion. Her tall shapely figure made that of the old man look very decrepit. When he had anything of importance to say, Mr. Boddy came to a stand, and Lydia would bend a little forward, listening to him so attentively that she was quite unaware of the

glances of those who passed by. So they got to the foot of Lambeth Bridge.

'We mustn't go too far,' Lydia said, 'or you'll be tired, grandad. Suppose we walk a little way along the Embankment. It's too cold, I'm afraid, to sit down. But isn't it nice to have sunshine! How that child must be enjoying herself, to be sure! She was almost crazy yesterday morning before she got off; I'm certain she didn't sleep not two hours in the night. It's very kind of that lady to keep her, isn't it? But everybody *is* kind to Thyrza, they can't help being.'

'No more they can, Lyddy; no more they can. But there's somebody else as I want to see enjoying herself a little. When'll your turn come for a bit of a holiday, my dear? You work year in year out, and you're so quiet over it anyone 'ud forget as you wanted a rest just like other people.'

'We shall see, grandad. Wait till the summer comes, and Thyrza's well settled down, and then who knows but you and me may run away together for a day at the seaside? I'm going to be rich, because they won't let me pay anything for my room. We'll keep that as a secret to ourselves.'

'Well, well,' said the old man, chuckling from sheer pleasure in her affection, 'there's no knowin'. I'd like to go to the seaside once more, and I'd rather you was with me than anyone else. We always find something to talk about, I think, Lyddy. And 'taint with everybody I care to talk nowadays. It's hard to find

people as has the same thoughts. But you and me, we remember together, don't we, Lyddy? Now, do *you* remember one night as there come a soldier into the shop, a soldier as wanted to buy——'

'A looking-glass!' Lydia exclaimed. 'I know! I remember!'

'A looking-glass! And when he'd paid for it, he took up his stick an' smashed the glass right in the middle, then walked off with it under his arm!'

'Why, what years it must be since I thought of that, grandad! And I ran away, frightened!'

'I was frightened myself, too. And we never could understand it! Last night, when I was lying awake, that soldier came back to me, and I laughed so; and I thought, I'll ask Lyddy to-morrow if she remembers that.'

They both laughed, then pursued their walk.

'Why look,' said Mr. Boddy presently, 'here's Mr. Ackroyd a-comin' along!'

Lydia had already seen him; that was why she had become silent.

'You're not going to stop, are you, grandad?' she asked, under her breath.

'Why no, my dear? Not if you don't wish.'

'I'd rather not.'

Ackroyd was walking with his hands in his pockets, looking carelessly about him. He recognised the two at a little distance, and drew one hand forth. Till he got quite near he affected not to have seen them; then,

without a smile, he raised his hat, and walked past, his pace accelerated. Lydia, also with indifferent face, just bent to the greeting. Mr. Boddy had given a friendly nod.

There was silence between the companions, then Lydia said:

'I've thought it better, grandad, not to—not to be quite the same with Mr. Ackroyd as I used to be.'

'Yes, yes, Lyddy; I understand. There's a deal of talk about him. I'm sorry. He's done me more than one good turn, and I hope he'll get straight again yet. I'm afraid, my dear, as—you know—the disappointment——'

Lydia interrupted with firmness.

'That's no excuse at all—not a bit! If he really felt the disappointment so much he ought to have borne it like a man. Other people have as much to bear. I never thought he was a man of that kind, never! We won't say anything more about him.'

Their conversation so lightened the way that they reached Westminster Bridge, and returned by the road which runs along the rear of the hospital.

'You won't come in, Lyddy?' said the old man, when they were near the shop again.

'Not to-day, grandad. I'm going to tea with Mrs. Grail and Gilbert, because Thyrza's away.'

He acquiesced, trying to conceal the sadness he felt. Lydia kissed his cheek, and left him.

All through tea in the Grails' parlour the talk was

of Thyrza. How was she passing her time? Was it as fine at Eastbourne as here in London? What sort of a lady was Mrs. Ormonde? And when the three drew chairs about the fire, Gilbert had something of moment to communicate, something upon which he had resolved since Thyrza's departure.

'Lyddy,' he began, 'mother and I think Thyrza had better not go to work again. As she is going to miss to-morrow morning, it'll be a good opportunity for making the change. Isn't it better?'

Lydia did not reply at once. Such a decided step as this reminded her how near the day was when, though they would still be near to each other, Thyrza and she must in a sense part. The thought was always a heavy one; she did not willingly entertain it.

'Do you think,' she asked at length, 'that Thyrza will feel she ought to stay at home?'

'I think she will, when I've spoken to her about it. We want you both to have your meals with us. Thyrza can help mother, and she'll have more time for her reading. Of course you must be just as much together as you like, but it would be pleasant if you would come down here to meals. Will you do us that kindness, Lyddy?'

'But,' Lydia began, doubtfully. Mrs. Grail interrupted her:

'Now I know what you're going to say, my dear. It isn't nice of you, Lyddy, if you spoil this little plan we've made. Just for the next three weeks! After

that you can be as independent as you please; yes, my dear, just as proud as you please. There's a great deal of pride in you, you know, and I don't like you the worse for it.'

'I don't think I'm proud at all,' said Lydia, smiling and reddening a little. 'If Thyrza agrees, then I will. Though I——'

'There now, that's all we want,' interposed the old lady. 'That's very good of you.'

By the first post in the morning arrived a letter addressed to 'Miss Trent,' bearing the Eastbourne postmark. Lydia for a moment had a great fear, but, when she had torn the envelope open, the first lines put her at rest. It was Mrs. Ormonde who wrote, and in words which made Lydia feel very happy. With the exception of a line once or twice from Mary Bower, she had never received a letter in her life; she was very proud of the honour. Gilbert had just come home for breakfast, and all rejoiced over the news of Thyrza.

It was hard for Lydia to sit through her morning at the workroom. Thyrza was to be at home by twelve o'clock. As soon as the dinner-hour struck, Lydia flung her work aside, and was in Walnut Tree Walk in less time than it had ever before taken her. Instinct told her that the child would be waiting upstairs alone, and not in the Grails' room. She flew up. Thyrza rose from a chair and met her.

Not, however, with the outburst of childish rapture which Lydia had anticipated. Their parts were re-

versed. When the elder sister sprang forward, breathless with her haste, unable to utter anything but broken terms of endearment, Thyrza folded her in her arms, and, without a spoken word, kissed her with grave tenderness. Her cheeks had the most unwonted colour; her eyes gleamed, and as Lydia's caresses continued, glistened with moisture.

'Dear Lyddy!' she murmured. A tear formed upon her eyelashes, and her voice made trembled music. 'Dear sister! You're glad to see me again?'

'It seems an age, my own darling! You can't think what Sunday was like to me without you. And how well you look, my beautiful! See what a letter I've had from Mrs. Ormonde. Do tell me what she's like! How did she come to ask you if you'd stay? To think of you saying I should be cross with her! But of course that was only fun. My dear one! And what's the sea like? Were you on the shore again this morning?'

'How many questions does that make, I wonder, Lyddy?' Thyrza said, with a smile still much graver than of wont. 'I shan't tell you anything till you've had dinner. It's all ready for you downstairs.'

'You know what they want us to do?'

'Oh, I've talked it all over with Mrs. Grail. I don't think we ought to refuse, Lyddy. And so I'm not to go to work any more? I wish it was the same for you, dear. Shall you find it very hard to go alone?'

'Hard? Not I! Why, whatever should I do

with myself if I stayed at home? It's different with you; you must learn all you can, so as to be able to talk to Gilbert.'

'Come to dinner!'

Lydia paused at the door.

'What has come to you, Thyrza?' she asked, looking in her sister's face. 'You're not the same, somehow. Oh, how *did* you manage to do your own hair? But there's something different in you, Blue-eyes.'

'Is there? Yes, perhaps. Oh, we've a deal to talk about to-night, Lyddy!'

'But Gilbert 'll want you to-night.'

'No. That must be to-morrow.'

And so it was. When all had sat together for an hour at Gilbert's late meal, the sisters went up to their room. Gilbert understood this perfectly well. The next evening would be his.

When it came, Mrs. Grail made an excuse to go and sit with Lydia. Thyrza had her easy-chair; Gilbert was at a little distance. The privileges he asked were very few. Sometimes, when Thyrza and he were alone, he would hold her hand for a minute, and at parting he kissed her, but more of acted tenderness than that he did not allow himself. To-night, whilst she was speaking, he gazed at her continuously. He too observed the change of which Lydia had at once become aware. Thyrza seemed to have grown older in those two days. Her very way of sitting was marked by a maturer dignity, and in her speech it was

impossible not to be struck with the self-restraint, the thoughtful choice of words, which had taken the place of her former impulsiveness.

She dwelt much upon the delight she had received from Miss Newthorpe's playing. That had clearly made a great impression upon her.

'There was something she played, Gilbert, that told just what I felt when I first saw the sea. Do you know what I mean? Does music ever seem to speak to you in that way? It's really as if it spoke words.'

'I understand you very well, Thyrza,' he answered, in a subdued voice. And he added, his eyes brightening: 'Shall I take you some night to a concert, a really good concert, at one of the large halls?'

'Will you?'

'Yes, I will. I'll find out from the newspaper, and we'll go together.'

She looked at him gratefully, but did not speak. As she remained silent, he drew his chair nearer and held his hand for her. She gave it, without meeting his look.

'Thyrza, I heard from Mr. Egremont this morning. He wants to know if I can be ready to begin at the library on May 7, that's a Monday. It won't be opened then, but we shall be able to begin arranging the books. The house will be ready before the end of this month. Will you come and be married to me three weeks from to-day?'

'Yes, Gilbert, I will.'

No flush, but an extreme pallor came upon her face. He felt a coldness in her hand.

'Then we shall go for a week to the seaside again,' he continued, his voice uncertain, 'and be back in time to get our house in order before the 7th of May.'

'Yes, Gilbert.'

She still did not look at him. He released her hand, and went on in a more natural tone:

'I had a letter from my brother this morning, as well. He'll have to come to London on business in about a month, he says; so I hope we shall be able to have him stay with us.'

'I hope so.'

She spoke mechanically, and then followed a rather long silence. Both were lost in thought. Nor did the conversation renew itself after this, for Thyrza seemed to have no more to tell of her Eastbourne experiences, and Gilbert found it enough to sit near her, at times searching her face for the meaning which was new-born in it.

She rose at length, and, when they had exchanged a few words with regard to her occupations now that she would remain at home, Thyrza approached him to say good-night. Instead of bending to kiss her at once, he held her hand in both his and said:

'Thyrza, look at me.'

She did so. His hands were trembling, and his features worked nervously.

'You have never said you love me,' he continued, just above a whisper. 'Will you say that now?'

For an instant she looked down, then raised her eyes again, and breathed:

'I love you, Gilbert.'

'I didn't think words were ever spoken that sounded sweeter than those!'

She spoke again, with an earnestness unlike anything he had ever seen in her, quite different from that which had inspired similar words when first she pledged herself to him.

'Gilbert, I will try with all my strength to be a good wife to you! I will!'

'And I hope, Thyrza, that the day when I fail in perfect love and kindness to you may be the last of my life!'

She raised her face. For the first time he put his arms about her and kissed her passionately.

Mrs. Grail said good-night and went downstairs as soon as Thyrza appeared. Thyrza seated herself and pressed a hand against her side; her heart beat painfully.

'Why there!' Lydia exclaimed of a sudden. 'She's left the photographs!'

'What photographs?' Thyrza asked.

Lydia took from the table an envelope which contained some dozen cartes-de-visite. They were all the portraits which Mrs. Grail and her son possessed,

and the old lady was very fond of looking over them and gossiping about them. She had brought them up to-night because she anticipated an evening of especial intimacy with Lydia.

Thyrza held out her hand for them. She knew them all, including the latest addition, which was a photograph of Walter Egremont. Egremont had given it to Grail about three weeks ago; it was two years old. She turned them out upon her lap.

'I think I'd better take them down now, hadn't I?' said Lydia.

'I wouldn't trouble till morning,' Thyrza answered, in a tired voice.

Two lay exposed before her: that of Gilbert, taken six years ago, and that of Egremont. Lydia, looking over her shoulder, remarked:

'What a boy Mr. Egremont looks, compared with Gilbert!'

Thyrza said nothing.

'Come, dear, put them in the envelope, and let me take them down.'

'Oh, never mind till morning, Lyddy!'

The voice was rather impatient.

'But I'm afraid Mrs. Grail 'll remember, and have the trouble of coming up.'

'She won't think it worth while. And I want to look at them.'

'Oh, very well, dear.'

The two unlike faces continued to lie uppermost.

CHAPTER V.

A SONG WITHOUT WORDS.

Whilst the repairs were going on in the house behind the school, the old caretaker still lived there. Egremont found that she had in truth nowhere else to go, and as it was desirable that someone should remain upon the premises, he engaged her to do so until the Grails entered into possession. She had in no way altered her crabbed behaviour. When told that there was no need for her to seek another home as yet, she merely said that it didn't matter much whether she went into the workhouse a few weeks sooner or later. Her bitterness was against the world at large; kind treatment had no effect upon her. Egremont tried to think that there was good beneath this harsh surface, but all his observation tended quite the other way. Mrs. Butterfield—that was her name—was probably nothing but a very sour, and perhaps malicious, old creature.

As soon as painters, plasterers and paperhangers were out of the way, Grail and Thyrza went to the house to decide what furniture it would be necessary to

buy. The outlay was to be as little as possible, for indeed there was but little money to spend. Mrs. Butterfield admitted them, but without speaking; when Gilbert made some kindly-meant remark about its being disagreeable for her to live in such a strong odour of paint, she muttered inarticulately and withdrew into the kitchen. Thyrza presently peeped into that room. The old woman was sitting on a low stool by the fire, her knees up to her chin, her grizzled hair unkempt; she looked so remarkably like a witch, and, on Thyrza's appearance, turned with a gaze of such extreme malignity, that the girl drew back in fear.

'I suppose she takes it ill that the old state of things has been disturbed,' Gilbert said. 'Mr. Egremont tells me he has found that she is to have a small weekly allowance from the chapel people, so I don't suppose she'll fall into want, and we know he wouldn't send her off to starve; that isn't his way.'

The removal of such things as were to be brought from Walnut Tree Walk, and the housing of the new furniture would take only a couple of days. This was to be done immediately before the wedding; then Lydia and Mrs. Grail would live in the house whilst the husband and wife were away.

Egremont found that the large school-room would be ready sooner than he had anticipated. When it was cleaned out, there was nothing to do save to fix shelves, a small counter, and two long tables. For some time he had been making extensive purchases of books, for

the most part from a second-hand dealer, who warehoused his volumes for him till the library should be prepared to receive them. He had drawn up, too, a skeleton catalogue, but this could not be proceeded with before the books were in some sort of order upon the shelves. He was nervously impatient to reach this stage. Since his last visit to Eastbourne he had seen no friends in civilised London, and now that he had no longer lectures to write, his state of mind grew ever more unsatisfactory. Loneliness, though to so great an extent self-imposed, weighed upon him intolerably. He believed that he was going through the dreariest time of his life.

How often he thought with envy of the little parlour in Walnut Tree Walk! To toil oneself weary through a long day in a candle factory, and then come back to the evening meal, with the certainty that a sweet young face would be there to meet one with its smile, sweet lips to give affectionate welcome—that would be better than this life which he led. He wished to go there again, but feared to do so without invitation. The memory of his evening there made drawing-rooms distasteful to him.

He had a letter from Mrs. Ormonde, in which a brief mention was made of Thyrza's visit. He replied:

'Why do you not tell me more of the impression made upon you by Miss Trent? It was a favourable one, of course, as you kept her with you over the Sunday. You do not mention whether Annabel saw

her. She is very fond of music; it would have been a kindness to ask Annabel to play to her. But I have Miss Newthorpe's promise that she and her father will come and see the library as soon as it is open; then at all events they will make the acquaintance of Mrs. Grail.

'She interests me very much, as you gather from my way of writing about her. I hope she will come to think of me as a friend. It will be delightful to watch her mind grow. I am sure she has faculties of a very delicate kind; I believe she will soon be able to appreciate literature. Has she not a strange personal charm, and is it not impossible to think of her becoming anything but a beautiful-natured woman? You too, now that you know her, will continue to be her friend—I earnestly hope so. If she could be for a little time with you now and then, how it would help to develop the possibilities that are in her!'

To the letter of which this was part, Mrs. Ormonde quickly responded:

'With regard to Miss Trent,' she said, 'I beg you not to indulge your idealistic habits of thought immoderately. I found her a pretty and interesting girl, and it is not unlikely that she may make a good wife for such a man as Mr. Grail—himself, clearly, quite enough of an idealist to dispense with the more solid housewifely virtues in his life-mate. But I add this, Walter: It certainly would not be advisable to fill her head too suddenly with a kind of thought to which she

has hitherto been a stranger. If I had influence with Mr. Grail, I should hint to him that he is going to marry a very young wife, and that, under the circumstances, the balance of character to be found in sober domestic occupation will, for some time, be what she most needs to aim at. You see, I am *not* an idealist, and I think commonplace domestic happiness of more account than aspirations which might not improbably endanger it. Forgive me for these remarks, which you will say have a slight odour of the kitchen, or, at best, of the store-room. Never mind; both are places without which the study could not exist.'

Egremont bit his lips over this; for the first time he was dissatisfied with Mrs. Ormonde. He wondered on what terms she had received Thyrza. He had imagined the girl as treated with every indulgence at The Chestnuts, but the tone of this letter made him fear lest Mrs. Ormonde had deemed it a duty to refrain from too much kindness. It was very unlike her; what had she observed that made her so disagreeably prudent all at once?

It added to his mental malaise. What change was befalling his life? Was he about to find himself actually sundered from the friends he had made in the sphere which his birth gave him no claim to enter? He said to himself that this might well come to pass. Had he not been growing conscious for some time of the artificiality of the link between himself and that so-called Society? Nay, conscious of it he had always

been; therein consisted much of his idealism; but only of late he had lost his liking for the company of people such as the Tyrrells, who were so pleasant because of their position in the world, and scarcely for any other reason. Now he was fast passing from that negative frame of mind to one of active opposition. He assured himself that a true and worthy impulse had gradually isolated him. How far he was now from Annabel! He had ceased—yes, in very deed, he had ceased—to think of her tenderly. Why trouble himself to search how that had come about? It was all part of the same tendency in his life. Even from Mrs. Ormonde he felt the beginnings of estrangement—or persuaded himself that he did. It all meant that he was reverting to the condition wherein he was born. His attempt to become a member of Society (with a capital) was proving itself a failure. Very well, he would find his friends in the working world. When he needed society of an evening, he would find it with Gilbert Grail and his wife. He would pursue his work more earnestly than ever; he would get his club founded, as soon as the library was ready for a rallying-place; he would seek diligently for the working men of hopeful character, and by force of sincerity win their confidence. Let the wealthy and refined people go their way.

And at this point he veritably experienced a great relief. For two days he went about almost joyously. His task was renewed before him, and his energy at the

same time had taken new life. Doubt, he said to himself, was once more vanquished—perchance finally.

Then came another letter from Mrs. Ormonde, asking him to come and drink the air of these delicious spring days by the shore. He replied that it was impossible to leave London. That very day he had despatched seven packing-cases full of volumes to the library, and he was going to begin the work of setting the books on the shelves.

That was a Monday; a week remained before Thyrza's marriage-day. Thyrza had not been to the new house since she went with Gilbert to see about the furniture. Her curiosity was satisfied: her interest in the place had strangely lessened. More than that: in walking by herself she never chose that direction, whereas formerly she had always liked to do so. It seemed as if she had some reason for avoiding sight of the building.

This Monday her mind again changed. She frequently went to meet her sister at the dinner-hour, and to-day, having set forth somewhat too early, she went round by way of Brook Street. No positive desire impelled her; it was rather as if her feet took that turning independently of her thoughts. On drawing near to the library she was surprised to see a van standing before the door; two men were carrying a wooden box into the building. She crossed to the opposite side of the way, and went forwards slowly. The men

came out, mounted to the box-seat of the van, and drove away.

That must be a delivery of books. Who was there to receive them ?

She crossed the street again, and approached the library door. She walked past it, stopped, came back. She tried the handle, and the door opened. There was no harm in looking in.

Amid a number of packing-cases stood Egremont. His head was uncovered, and he had a screw-driver in his hand, as if about to open the chests. At sight of Thyrza he came forward with a look of delight and shook hands with her.

'So you have discovered what I'm about! I didn't wish anyone to know. You see, the shelves are all ready, and I couldn't resist the temptation of having books brought. Will you keep the secret?'

'I won't say a word, sir.'

Warmth on Thyrza's cheeks answered the pleasure in his eyes as he looked at her. Perhaps neither had fully felt how glad it would make them to meet again. When Thyrza had given her assurance, Egremont's face showed that he was going to say something in a different tone.

'Miss Trent, will you speak to me in future as you do to your friends? I want very much to be one of your friends, if you will let me.'

Thyrza kept her eyes upon the ground. She could not find the fitting words for reply. He continued :

'Grail is my friend, and we always talk as friends should. Won't you cease to think of me as a stranger?'

'I don't think of you in that way, Mr. Egremont.'

'Then let us shake hands again in the new way.'

Thyrza gave hers. She just met his eyes for a moment; her own had a smile of intense happiness.

'Yes, keep this a secret,' Egremont went on, quickly resuming his ordinary voice. 'I'll surprise Grail in a few days, by bringing him in. Now, how am I to get this lid off? How tremendously firm it is! I suppose I ought to have got the men to do it, but I brought a screw-driver in my pocket, thinking it would be easy enough. Ah, there's a beginning! I ought to have a hammer.'

'Shall I go and ask Mrs. Butterfield if she has one?'

'Oh no, I'll go myself.'

'I'll run—it won't take me a minute!'

She went out by the door that led into the house. In the dark passage she was startled by coming in contact with someone.

'Oh, who is that?'

A muttered reply informed her that it was the old woman. They went forward into the nearest room. There was a disagreeable smile on Mrs. Butterfield's thin lips.

'If you please, have you got a hammer?' Thyrza asked. 'Mr. Egremont wants one.'

The old woman went apart, and returned with a hammer which was used for breaking coals.

'Oh, could you just wipe it?' Thyrza said. 'The handle's so very black.'

It was done, ungraciously enough, and Thyrza hastened back. Egremont was standing as she had left him.

'Ah, now I can manage! Thank you.'

With absorbed interest Thyrza watched the process.

'I saw them bringing the last box in,' she said; 'that's why I came to look.'

'That was a risk I foresaw—that someone would notice the cart. But perhaps you are the only one.'

'I hope so—as you don't want anyone to know.'

She paused, then added:

'I was going to meet Lyddy—my sister. I don't go to work myself now, Mr. Egremont. Perhaps Gilbert has told you?'

'No, he hasn't mentioned it. But I am glad to hear it.'

'I don't much like my sister going alone, but she doesn't really mind.'

'I hope I shall soon know your sister.'

He had suspended the work, and stood with one foot upon the case. Thyrza reflected, then said:

'I hope you will like her, Mr. Egremont.'

'I am sure I shall. I know that you are very fond of your sister.'

'Yes.' Her voice faltered a little. 'I couldn't have gone to live away from her.'

Egremont bent to his task again, and speedily raised the lid. There was a covering of newspapers, and then the books were revealed.

'Now,' he said, 'it shall be your hand that puts the first on the shelf.'

He took out the first volume of a copy of Gibbon, and walked with it to the wall.

'This shall be its place, and there it shall always stay.'

'Will you tell me what the book is about, Mr. Egremont?' Thyrza asked, timidly taking it from him. 'I should like to remember it.'

He told her, as well as he could. Thyrza stood in thought for a moment, then just opened the pages. Egremont watched her.

'I wonder whether I shall ever be able to read that?' she said, in an under-voice.

'Oh yes, I'm sure you will.'

'And I've to stand it here?'

'Just there. You shall put all the volumes in their place, one after the other. There are eight of them.'

He brought them all together, and one by one she took them from him. Then they went back to the case again, and there was a short silence.

'Gilbert's going to take me to a concert to-night, Mr. Egremont,' Thyrza said, looking at him shyly.

'Is he? You'll enjoy that. What concert?'

'It's at a place called St. James's Hall.'

'Oh yes! You'll hear admirable music.'

'I've never been to a concert before. But when I was at Eastbourne I heard a lady play the piano. I *did* enjoy that!'

Egremont started.

'Was it Miss Newthorpe?' he asked, looking at her without a smile.

'Yes, that was her name.'

She met his look. Walter half turned away, then bent down to the books again.

'I know her,' he said. 'She plays well.'

He took a couple of volumes, and went with them to the shelves, where he placed them, without thought, next to the Gibbon. But in a moment he noticed the title, and moved them to another place. He had become absent. Thyrza, remaining by the case, followed his movements with her eyes. As he came back, he asked:

'Did you like Mrs. Ormonde?'

'Yes. She was very kind to me.'

To him it seemed an inadequate reply, and strengthened his fear that Mrs. Ormonde had not shown all the warmth he would have desired. Yet, as it proved, she had asked Annabel to play for Thyrza. Thyrza, too, felt that she ought to say more, but all at once she found a difficulty in speaking. Her thoughts had strayed.

'I think I must go now,' she said, 'or I shall miss my sister.'

'In that case, I won't delay you. I shall open one or two more of these boxes, then go somewhere for lunch. Good-bye!'

Thyrza said good-bye rather hurriedly, and without raising her face.

It happened that just then Mr. Bower was coming along Brook Street. He did not usually leave the works at mid-day, but to-day an exceptional occasion took him to Paradise Street in the dinner-hour. Thyrza came forth from the library just as he neared the corner; she did not see him, but Bower at once observed her. There was nothing singular in her having been there; possibly the furnishing of the house had begun. In passing the windows of the future library, Bower looked up at them with curiosity. Egremont stood there, gazing into the street. He recognised Bower, nodded, and drew back.

Bower did not care to overtake Thyrza. He avoided her by crossing the street. She in the meantime was not going straight to meet her sister; after walking slowly for a little distance, she turned in a direction the opposite of that she ought to have taken. Then she stopped to look into a shop-window.

A clock showed her that by this time Lydia would be at home. Yet still she walked away from her own street. She said to herself that five-and-twenty minutes must pass before Gilbert would leave the house to

return to his work. The way in which she now was would bring her by a long compass into Kennington Road. Rain threatened, and she had no umbrella; none the less, she went on.

At home they awaited her in surprise at her unpunctuality. Mrs. Grail could not say when she had left the house. All the morning Thyrza had sat upstairs by herself. Just when Gilbert was on the point of departure, the missing one appeared.

'Where *have* you been, child?' cried Lydia. 'Why, it's begun to rain; you're all wet!'

'I went further than I meant to,' Thyrza replied, throwing off her hat, and at once taking a seat at the table. 'I hope you didn't wait for me. I forgot the time.'

'That was with thinking of the concert to-night,' said Gilbert, laughing.

'I shouldn't wonder,' assented Lydia.

Thyrza smiled, but offered no further excuse. Gilbert and Lydia left the room and the house together. Their directions were opposite, but Gilbert went a few steps Lydia's way.

'I want you to alter your mind and go with us to-night,' he said.

'No, really! It isn't worth the expense, Gilbert. I don't care so much for music.'

'The expense is only a shilling. And Thyrza won't be quite happy without you. I want her to enjoy herself without *any* reserve. You'll come?'

'Well. But——'

'All right. Be ready both of you by half-past six.'

They nodded a good-bye to each other.

Thyrza was making believe to eat her dinner. Mrs. Grail saw what a pretence it was.

'Was there ever such an excitable child!' she said, affectionately. 'Now do eat something more, dear! I shall tell Gilbert he must never let you know beforehand when he's going to take you anywhere.'

But Thyrza had no appetite. She helped the old lady to clear the table, then ran upstairs.

It was an unspeakable relief to be alone. She had never known such a painful feeling of guilt as whilst she sat with Gilbert and Lydia regarding her. Yet why? Her secret, she tried to assure herself, was quite innocent, trivial indeed. But why had she been unable to come straight home? What had held her away, as forcibly as if a hand had lain upon her?

She moved aimlessly about the room. It was true that these last two days she had agitated herself with anticipation of the concert, but it was something quite different which now put confusion into her thought, and every now and then actually caught her breath. She did not feel well. She wished Lyddy could have remained at home with her this afternoon, for she had a need of companionship, of a sort of help. There was Mrs. Grail; but no, she had rather not be with Mrs. Grail just now.

On the table were a few articles of clothing which

Lydia and she had made during the last fortnight, things she was going to take away with her. This morning she had given them a few finishing touches of needlework, now they could be put away. She went to the chest of drawers. Of the two small drawers at the top, one was hers, one was Lydia's; the two long ones below were divided in the same way. She drew one out and turned over the linen. How some young lady about to be married—Miss Paula Tyrrell, suppose —would have viewed with pitying astonishment the outfit with which Thyrza was more than content. But Thyrza had never viewed marriage as an opportunity of enriching her wardrobe.

Having put her things away, she opened another drawer, and looked over some of Lydia's belongings. She stroked them lightly, and returned each carefully to its place, saying to herself, 'Lyddy wants such and such a thing. She'll have more money to spend on herself soon. And she shall have a really nice present on her next birthday. Gilbert 'll give me money to buy it.'

Then she went to the mantelpiece, and played idly with a little ornament that stood there. The trouble had been lighter for a few minutes, now it weighed again. Her heart beat irregularly. She leaned her elbows on the mantelpiece, and covered her face with her hands. There was a strange heat in her blood, her breath was hot.

Was it raining still? No, the pavement had dried,

and there was no very dark cloud in the sky. She could not sit here all through the afternoon. A short walk would perhaps remove the headache which had begun to trouble her.

She descended the stairs very lightly, and hastened almost on tip-toe along the passage; the front door she closed as softly as possible behind her, and went in the direction away from Mrs. Grail's parlour window. To be sure she was free to leave the house as often as she pleased, but for some vague reason she wished just now not to be observed. Perhaps Gilbert would think that she went about too much; but she could not, she could not, sit in the room.

Without express purpose, she again walked towards Brook Street. No, she was not going to the library again; Mr. Egremont might still be there, and it would seem so strange of her. But she went to a point whence she could see the building, and for some minutes stood looking at it. Was he still within—Mr. Egremont? Those books would take him a long time to put on the shelves. As she looked someone came out from the door; Mr. Egremont himself. She turned and almost ran in her desire to escape his notice.

He was going home. Even whilst hurrying, she tried to imagine how he was going to spend his evening. From Gilbert's description she had made a picture of his room in Great Russell Street. Did he sit there all the evening among his books, reading, writing? Not always, of course. He was a gentleman, he had friends

to go and see, people who lived in large houses, very grand people. He talked with ladies, with such as Miss Newthorpe. (Thyrza did not trouble to notice where she was. Her feet hurried her on, her head throbbed. She was thinking, thinking.)

Such as Miss Newthorpe. Yes, he knew that lady; knew her very well, as was evident from the way in which he spoke of her. Of what did they talk, when they met? No doubt she had often played to him, and when she played he would look at her, and she was very beautiful.

She would not think of Miss Newthorpe. Somehow she did not feel to her in the same way as hitherto.

He must have many friends. But what had he said this morning? Did he not say that he wished her to speak to him as a friend, to be one of his friends? And then he had held out his hand, and how kindly, how softly, he looked! Must she tell Gilbert of that? She could not do so yet, as it would involve the breaking of her promise. But she must tell him as soon as there was no longer need to keep the secret about the books. Gilbert would be glad, would he not be glad? Yet it would be so difficult to tell him, for all that it was such a simple thing.

When she was married, she would of course see him very often—Mr. Egremont. He would be at the library constantly, no doubt. Perhaps he would come sometimes and sit in their room. And when he began his lectures in the room upstairs, would it not be

possible for her to hear him? She would so like to, just once. She could at all events creep softly up and listen at the door. How beautiful his lectures must be! Gilbert could never speak strongly enough in praise of them. They would be a little hard to understand, perhaps; but then she was going to read books more than ever, and get knowledge.

Now that he had said she was his friend, it would be quite natural to tell him of the progress she made. She had wanted to say something about that this morning, but there was not time, and then——. Yes, that was why she left him so suddenly; he spoke of Miss Newthorpe in that particular way; it had disturbed her, put her thoughts into confusion.

She was in the part of Lambeth Walk farthest from her own street, having come there by chance, for she had observed nothing on the way. She did not wish to go home yet. One end of Paradise Street joins the Walk, and into that she turned. If only there were a chance of Totty Nancarrow's being at home! But Totty was very regular at work. Still, an inquiry at the door would be no harm.

Little Jack Bunce was standing in the open doorway; he had a rueful countenance, marked with recent tears.

'Do you know whether Miss Nancarrow's in?' Thyrza asked of the little fellow.

He regarded her, and nodded silently.

'Really? She's really in?'

'Yes, she's up in her room,' was the grave answer.

Thyrza ran upstairs. A tap at the door, and Totty's voice—unmistakable—gave admission. The girl sat sewing; on the bed lay a child, asleep.

Totty, looking delighted at Thyrza's coming, held up her finger to impose quietness. Thyrza took the only other chair there was, and drew it near to her friend.

'That's Nelly Bunce,' Totty said in a low voice, nodding to the bed. 'Just when I was going back to work, what did the child do but tumble head over heels half down stairs, running after me. It's a wonder she didn't kill herself. I don't think there's no more harm done except a big bump on the back of the head, but Mrs. Ladds wasn't in, and I didn't like to go and leave the little thing; she cried herself to sleep. So there's half a day lost!'

Thyrza kept silence. She had felt that she would like to talk with Totty, yet now she could find nothing to say.

'How's things going on?' Totty asked, smiling.

'Very well, I think.'

'So the day's coming, Thyrza.'

Thyrza played with the ends of a small boa which was about her neck. She had no reply. Her tongue refused to utter a sound.

'What's the matter?'

Thyrza's hand fell, she touched the sewing that was on Totty's lap. Then she touched Totty's hand.

'I've got a headache,' she said, finding her voice at length. 'I've been walking about. I'm so glad you were here.'

'Did you want me for something?'

'Only to talk a little. We're going to the concert to-night.'

'I hope you'll like it,' Totty said, examining the other's face.

'Yes, I know I shall like it. But I wish my head would get better.'

'Shall I make you a cup of tea?'

'No, I'd rather you sat and talked. Will you tell me about—about Mr. Ackroyd?'

Totty drew in her lips, knitted her brows, then bent to bite off an end of cotton.

'What is there to tell?' she asked.

'Is he doing as he promised?'

'As far as I know,' said the other, in a voice which affected indifference.

'And do you think he'll keep right till Christmas?'

'That's a good deal more than I can say, or anybody else.'

'But you'll do your best to make him?'

'I don't know that I shall bother much. It's his own look-out. I shall know what he means if he goes wrong again.'

'But——'

'Well? What?'

'You hope he'll keep his promise?' Thyrza said,

bending a little nearer, and dropping her eyes as soon as she had spoken.

'H'm. Yes. Perhaps I do,' said Totty, putting her head on one side. And forthwith she began to hum a tune, which however she checked the next moment, remembering Nelly.

'But you speak in a queer way, Totty.'

'So do you, Thyrza. What are you bothering about?'

Again she searched Thyrza's face, this time with something very curious in her gaze, a kind of suspicion one would have said.

'I—I like to know about you,' Thyrza said, with embarrassment.

'I've told you all there is to tell.'

'But you haven't told me really whether—— Do you,' she sank her voice still lower, 'do you love him, Totty?'

A singular flush came and went upon the other girl's face. She herself was little disposed to use sentimental words, and it was the first time that Thyrza had done so to her. The coarseness she heard from certain of her companions did not abash her, but this word of Thyrza's seemed to do so strangely. She looked up in a moment. Thyrza's face was agitated.

'What does that matter?' Totty said, in a rather hard voice. And she added, drawing herself up awkwardly, 'You've made your own choice, Thyrza.'

For an instant surprise held Thyrza mute; then she exclaimed:

'But, Totty, you don't think——? I was thinking of you, dear; only of you. You never supposed I—— Oh, say you didn't think that, Totty!'

Totty relaxed her muscles a little. She smiled, shook her head, laughed uneasily.

'I meant, dear,' Thyrza continued, 'that I hope you *do* love him, as you're going to marry him. I hope you love him very much, and I hope he loves you. I'm sorry I said that. I thought you wouldn't mind.'

'I don't mind at all, old dear. If you *must* know—I like him pretty well.'

'But it ought to be *more* than that—it ought, Totty—much more than that, dear——'

She was trembling. She took Totty's hand and kissed it, then began to sob hysterically. Totty drew her hand away, and looked at her in surprise, coldly.

'Don't go on like that,' she said. 'There, you've woke the child, of course! Now there'll be two of you crying. See which can make most noise. Now, Nelly! Well, I call this nice!'

At the sound of the child's voice, Thyrza at once restrained herself and rose from her chair. Totty managed to quieten her little charge, whom she took upon her lap. She did not look at Thyrza.

'Good-bye, Totty!' said the latter, holding out her hand.

'Good-bye!' Totty returned, but without appear-

ing to notice the hand offered. 'I hope you'll be better before next Monday, Thyrza.'

'You're unkind to-day, Totty. I wish I hadn't come in.'

There was no reply to this, so Thyrza said another farewell and left the room.

She had hoped to find some relief from her suffering in a conversation with Totty, but instead of that she had gained a new trouble. Yet a certain indignation supported her as she walked homewards. How could Totty so misunderstand her! Well, she must think what she chose, since she was capable of forming such suspicions. You know that one's resentment of misconstruction is never keener that when one feels the error to have been almost inevitable, when one has been obliged to withhold the word which would make all clear. The word was already in Thyrza's heart, but to speak it would have been like turning to face a danger which flight may still preserve one from. Flight? It was the thought which now began to possess her in various forms. There was something from which she must escape, by whatever means; some pursuing misery which she must outrun. She could look to no one for aid, not even to Lyddy.

She got back to her room, and, hopeless of otherwise passing the time till Lydia's return, lay down on the bed. Perhaps she could close her eyes for half an hour. But when she had turned restlessly from one side to the other, there came a knock at the door. She

knew it must be Mrs. Grail, and made no answer. But the knock was repeated, and the door opened. Mrs. Grail looked in, and, seeing Thyrza, came to the bedside.

'Aren't you well, my dear?' she asked, gently.

Thyrza made pretence of having just awoke.

'I thought I'd try and sleep a little,' she replied, holding her face with one hand. 'No, I don't feel quite well.'

'Lie quiet, then. I won't disturb you. Come down as soon as you'd like some tea.'

It was a weary time till Lydia returned, although she came back nearly half an hour earlier than usual. Thyrza still lay on the bed. When they had exchanged a few words, the latter said:

'I don't think I can go to-night, Lyddy. My head's bad.'

'Oh, what a pity! Can't we do something to make it better?'

Thyrza turned her face away.

'I'd altered my mind,' Lydia continued. 'I meant to go with you.'

'Really? You'll go with us?'

Thyrza felt that this would lessen the strange reluctance with which through the afternoon she had thought of the concert. She at once rose, and consented more cheerfully to try if a cup of tea would help her. She bathed her forehead, smoothed her hair, and went down.

It was not long before Gilbert entered, he too having come away earlier from work. In order to get a seat in the gallery of the concert hall, they must be soon at the doors. Thyrza declared that she felt much better. Her heavy eyes gave little assurance of this, but something of her eagerness had returned, and for the time she had indeed succeeded in subduing the torment within.

An omnibus took the three into Piccadilly. They were not too early at the hall, for the accustomed crowd had already begun to assemble. Thyrza locked her arm in her sister's, Gilbert standing behind them. He whispered a word now and then to one or the other, but Thyrza kept silence; her cheeks were flushed; she inspected all the faces about her. At length, admission was gained and seats secured.

Thyrza sat between the other two, but she still kept her hold on Lydia's arm, until the latter said laughingly:

'You're not afraid of losing me now. I expect we shall be dreadfully hot here soon.'

She withdrew her hand. Gilbert began to talk to her. Had it not been for the circumstances, he must have observed a difference in Thyrza's manner to him. She scarcely ever met his look, and when she spoke it was with none of the usual spontaneity. But she seemed to be absorbed in observation of the people who had begun to seat themselves in other parts of the hall. The toilettes were a wonder to her. Lydia, too,

they interested very much; she frequently whispered a comment on such as seemed to her 'nice' or the contrary. She could not help trying to think how Thyrza would look if 'dressed like a lady.'

Thyrza started, so perceptibly that Lydia asked her what was the matter.

'Nothing,' she answered, moving as if to seat herself more comfortably. But henceforth her eyes were fixed in one direction, on a point down in the body of the hall. She no longer replied to the remarks of either of her companions. The flush remained warm upon her cheeks.

'Thyrza!' whispered Gilbert, when the musicians were in their places, and the preliminary twanging and screeching of instruments under correction had begun. 'There's Mr. Egremont!'

'Is he? Where?'

'Do you see that tall lady in the red cloak? No, more to the left; there's a bald man on the other side of him.'

'Yes, I see him.'

She waited a moment, then repeated the news to Lydia, with singular indifference. Then she began to gaze in quite other directions. The instrumental uproar continued.

'Oh dear!' said Lydia, with a wry face. 'I'm sure *that* kind of music won't do your head any good. Is it still better?'

'I think so—yes, yes.'

'Grandad doesn't take anything like that time to

tune his fiddle,' the other whispered, conscious that she was daring in her criticism.

Thyrza, on an impulse, conveyed the remark to Gilbert, who laughed silently.

The concert began. Thyrza's eyes had again fixed themselves on that point down below, and during the first piece they did not once move. Her breathing was quick. The heart in her bosom seemed to swell, as always when some great emotion possessed her, and with difficulty she kept her vision unclouded. Lydia often looked at her, so did Gilbert; she was unconscious of it.

'Did you like that?' Gilbert asked her, when the piece was over.

'Yes, very much.'

She had leaned back. Lydia sought her hand; she received a pressure in return, but the other hand did not remain, as she expected it would.

Gilbert himself was not much disposed to speak. He, too, was moved in the secret places of his being—moved to that ominous tumult of conflicting joy and pain which in the finer natures comes of music intensely heard. He had been at concerts before, but had little anticipated that he would ever attend one in such a mood as was his to-night. It seemed to him that he had not yet realised his happiness, that in his most rapturous moments he had rated it but poorly, unimaginatively. The strong wings of that glorious wordless song bore him into a finer air, where his

faculties of mind and heart grew unconditioned. If it were possible to go back into the world endowed as in these moments! To the greatest man has come the same transfiguration, the same woe of foreseen return to limits. But one thing was real and would not fail him. She who sat by him was his—his now and for ever. Why had he yet loved her so little?

'She is there; I can touch her; if I turn my eyes I shall see her.' He played with himself. Wishing to look at her, he would not. He would wait till she spoke a word, till that ever subtle music of her voice, which he had never enough appreciated, should break his dream. Try now to suppose that it is *all* a dream. 'I am sitting here by myself, as I did at my last concert two years ago. I am a dull, uncompanioned fellow, whom no one will ever love, who will never in life find the fulfilment of but one wish. Yet I dreamt for the moment that there was a gold-haired girl of the most delicate beauty——'

'Gilbert!'

Ah, that was the voice! He turned to her, sought her eyes with a passion of tenderness. She showed the next piece on her programme.

'Do you know this next?'

He shook his head. His look must have touched her, for Thyrza met his eyes steadily.

'Your head is bad still?'

'No.'

She smiled strangely.

'I thought you seemed to be in pain.'

'No.'

The second piece began. Again she looked down into the hall. After a while there came a piece of vocal music. The singer was not of much reputation, but to Thyrza her voice seemed more than human. In the interval which followed she whispered to Lydia:

'I shall never pretend to sing again.'

Egremont had risen in his place, and was looking about him. Thyrza was yet in some doubt whether he was alone. But he had not yet spoken to that lady next to him, and now, on sitting down, he did not speak. He must be without companion.

CHAPTER VI.

RAPIDS.

In the crowd with which they mingled on passing out again, Thyrza saw men in evening dress; she looked in every direction for Egremont, but was disappointed. Gilbert had begged her to hold his arm; he moved forward as quickly as possible, and with Lydia following they were soon in the street. Gilbert wished to cross, for the sake of quickly getting out of the throng. Thyrza threw one glance back. A hat was raised by someone going in the opposite direction, who also had turned his head. She had seen him. She was glad he did not come up to speak. Could he discern the flash of joy which passed over her face as she recognised him? She hoped he had, but at once hoped that he had not.

There was waiting for an omnibus. Thyrza still had her arm within Gilbert's; she was unconscious of all the bustle amid which she stood, unconscious of the pressure with which Gilbert drew her nearer to him. When at length bidden, she entered the vehicle, and leaned back with her eyes closed.

How dark and quiet these streets of Lambeth seemed! As she passed the threshold of the house, a sudden chill fell upon her, and she shook. How sombre the passage was, with its dim lamp suspended against the wall! Voices seemed strange; when Mrs. Grail welcomed her in the parlour, she did not recognise the sound.

'We mustn't talk to-night,' Lydia was saying. 'Thyrza, you look like a ghost; you must just eat a mouthful and get to bed quickly. I know your head's bad again.'

Thyrza was in no danger of talking much. With difficulty she uttered a few disconnected words. To eat was impossible. She begged to be allowed to go upstairs at once.

'You must drink just this drop of milk,' said Mrs. Grail. 'I got it in on purpose, because I thought it would be the best thing for you.'

She drank it at once, as if thirsty, then bade goodnight to Gilbert and his mother. Lydia, lingering behind for a moment, said:

'I do hope it won't make her ill, all this excitement! She has been that strange all the time, hasn't she, Gilbert?'

Gilbert believed that he understood quite well the meaning of her muteness.

'It's been rather too long for her,' he remarked. 'I should have liked to bring her away at the end of the first part.'

'Oh, it has been lovely!' Lydia exclaimed. 'And Mr. Egremont was there; we saw him, but he couldn't see us. But I mustn't talk; I'm anxious about my child.'

She ran off.

Thyrza could not be persuaded to get to bed immediately. Neither could she sit still, but walked restlessly about the floor.

'How hot it is!' she complained. 'Do you mind if I open the window just a little?'

'I don't, but I'm afraid it'll give you cold. Now do undress, there's a dear!'

'Just for a minute.'

She threw the window up, and stood breathing the air. Her thoughts strayed into the darkness. Had Mr. Egremont gone to the concert just because she mentioned that she was going? It was not likely, but perhaps so. When should she see him to speak of it? Would he still be arranging books the next morning?

'Now, Thyrza, you *must* shut the window! I shall be angry. Do as I tell you, and get to bed at once.'

At the voice, Thyrza drew the window down, then turned and stood before her sister, as if she were going to say something. But she did not speak.

'Do you feel ill, dear?' Lydia asked, anxiously.

'Not well, Lyddy. Don't get cross with me. I'll go to bed directly.'

She walked again the length of the room, then began to hum an air. It was the first song of the

concert. She took the crumpled programme from her pocket, and glanced over it. Lydia moved impatiently. Thyrza put the programme down on the table, and began to loosen her dress.

'Are you glad you went, Lyddy?' she asked, in a tired voice.

'I shan't be glad we any of us went if it's going to make you ill, Thyrza.'

'I shall be all right to-morrow, I dare say. I wonder whether Mr. Egremont often goes to concerts?'

'Very likely. He can afford it.'

'I mustn't go again for a long time.'

She had seated herself on the bed and was undoing the braid of her hair. She spoke the last words thoughtfully. In a minute or two the light was out.

Lydia soon fell asleep. In the very early morning a movement of her sister's awoke her. She found that Thyrza was sitting up in the bed.

'What is it, dear?' she asked. 'Lie down and go to sleep.'

'I can't, Lyddy, I can't! I *am* so tired, and I haven't closed my eyes. Keep awake with me a minute, will you?'

Lydia took the sleepless girl in her arms.

'The music won't leave me,' Thyrza moaned. 'It's just as if I heard them playing now.'

Lydia nursed her into a fitful sleep.

Though Thyrza had no work to go to, she still always rose together with her sister, and, whilst the

latter put the room in order, went down to assist Mrs. Grail in getting the breakfast. But on the morning after the concert Lydia was glad to see that the head beside her own was weighed down with sleep when the hour for getting up had come. She dressed as quietly as possible, leaving the blind drawn, and descended to say that Thyrza would be a little longer than usual. Gilbert was in the parlour.

'Has she slept well?' he asked.

'Not very well. She couldn't get the sound of the music out of her ears. But she's fast now.'

'We shall have to be careful of her, Lyddy,' Gilbert said, anxiously.

For he had had her face before him all night, with its pale, wearied look of over-excitement. He knew how delicate a nature it was that he was going to take into his charge, and already his love was at times gently mingled with fear. The strongest love always is; from its birth-moment it is conscious of that jealous spectre with the deathly eyes which watch so ceaselessly.

Lydia went upstairs again, and softly into the room. Thyrza had just awoke and was sitting with her hands together upon her face.

'What time is it?' she asked. 'Why did you let me sleep? Have you been up long?'

Lydia constrained her to lie down again. She was unwilling at first, but in the end fell back with a sigh of relief.

'What day is it, Lyddy? Oh, Tuesday, of course. I suppose the days 'll go very slow till Saturday. I'm sure I don't know what I shall do all the time.'

'Don't trouble about it now, dear. Try and sleep a little more, and I'll bring you up some breakfast just before I go.'

'That'll be like when I was poorly, won't it, Lyddy?'

She lay and laughed quietly.

'You feel better?'

'Oh yes. Is it a fine morning?'

'The pavement's just drying.

'Good-night!'

She drew the clothes over her head. Lydia could hear her still laughing, and wondered. Thyrza could not have told what it was that amused her.

She did not sleep again, but had breakfast in bed. Lydia sat with her as long as possible. Thyrza, as soon as she heard the front door close behind her sister, sprang on to the floor and began to dress with nervous rapidity; her hands were so unsteady that she had all sorts of difficulties with buttons and hooks and eyes.

'Don't trouble with your hair,' Lydia had said. 'I'll do it at dinner-time.'

But Thyrza could not obey in this. She did the plaiting twice over, being dissatisfied with the first result, and even took a new piece of blue ribbon for the ends.

The sun was shining. That always affected her pleasurably, and this morning, as soon as she was dressed, a gladness altogether without conscious reason made her sing, again the song of the concert. The air, which she could not wholly remember the night before, had grown to completeness in her mind; she longed to know the words, that the whole song might henceforth stay with her. And the sun, so rare in our dull skies, seemed to warm the opposite houses. She threw open the window, and heard the clocks striking nine.

'I'll just make the bed and put things straight, then—oh, then I must really go and do something for Mrs. Grail. I left her alone nearly all yesterday. And then I might go and meet Lyddy. But it's a long time till half-past twelve. Perhaps——'

Having made the bed she sat down to rest for a moment. After all, the headache was certainly not gone, though it had been disguising itself. The moment grew to a quarter of an hour. Her eyes seemed to behold something very clearly, just in front, down there on the floor. But the floor itself had made way for a large hall; among rows of people she saw a tall lady in a red cloak, and a bald-headed gentleman, and between them someone whose face was at an angle which allowed her to see it very well, to note even the look, not quite a smile, of pleasure which made it so interesting. She knew no other face which affected her as that did. She desired it to turn full upon her, to look straight into hers with its clear, gentle eyes, which

seemed to be so full of wonderful knowledge. Once or twice, yes, in truth, once or twice it had done so, but never for long enough. It would do so yet again. Oh but not for long enough! A look not of instants, but of minutes, of full minutes ticked to their last second; what would she give for that! One such gaze and she would be satisfied. It was not to ask much, surely not much.

How many months? Yes, about two months since she met him first in the upper room. It was a good frank gaze which he gave her then, and, had she but known it, the thirst began therewith. When she knew that he was coming to spend an hour down in the parlour, had she not felt a strange warmth in the thought, 'I shall meet his eyes again?' But the disappointment if he had not come would not have been so very hard to bear. Now, suppose someone said, 'Mr. Egremont has gone away for a long time; it is doubtful, indeed, whether we shall ever see him again!' She sprang up and pressed her hands together upon her heart. 'Oh, but he would say good-bye to me! One doesn't go away without saying good-bye to a real friend. And he said——'

Nonsense! How could she think such things! Why, she was going to live there, behind the library, and he would come often, very often. For a time he would certainly come every day. To be sure, she could not see him daily. Her duties would be in the house; she would be a wife; people would call her 'Mrs. Grail.'

That sounded strange; very differently from what it had done till quite lately. 'Mrs. Grail;' always, for the rest of her life, 'Mrs. Grail.'

A voice whispered, a very timid, one would have said a guilty voice, 'Who will be called "Mrs. Egremont"?' Not once; the voice, faint as it was, had an echo, a tingling echo from her heart outwards to the smallest vein. Who will bear that name? Some tall, beautiful, richly-clad lady, such as Miss Newthorpe. Was there anyone who at this moment sat alone, longing for one look of his eyes? Did ladies think and feel in that way? or only foolish little work-girls, who all their lives had dreamed dreams of a world that was not theirs? Did ladies ever press down a heart beating almost to anguish and say, half-aloud, to themselves: 'I love you!'

No; a stately life theirs, no weakness, no sense of a measureless need, self-respect ever, and ever respect from all about them. Think of Miss Newthorpe's face. How noble it was! How impossible that it should plead for anything. It might concede with a high, gracious smile, but not beseech anything. That was the part of poor girls who had not been taught, in whom it was no shame to look up to one far above them and long—long for kindness.

The sunlight was creeping along the floor, nearer to her. Oh sun of spring! nearer, nearer! Your warmth upon my hands, upon my face! Your warmth upon my heart, that *something* warm may press there!

The clocks were striking ten. It was unkind to leave Mrs. Grail alone. The girl hired to do rough work was coming to-day, but for all that it behoved her to be attentive to the good old lady, who never spoke to her save with good, motherly words.

Yes, away with it all! She must go down and be company to Gilbert's mother. Had she forgotten that in less than a week she would be Gilbert's wife? A simple test: could she speak out these thoughts of hers to Lyddy? The hot current in her veins was answer enough. And that had been the criterion of right and wrong with her since she was a little child. Lyddy knew the right instinctively, and never failed to act upon her knowledge. What had been Lyddy's thoughts of Luke Ackroyd? Perhaps not very different from these to which she had been listening; for Lyddy too was a work-girl, not a lady. Yet the brave sister had kept it all hidden away; more, had done her very best to bring together Luke and someone else whom he loved. How was it possible to reach that height of unselfishness? But the example should not be without its effect.

Thyrza presented herself in the parlour. The room was in some disorder; a girl was on her knees by the fireplace, cleaning. Thyrza went down to the little back kitchen, which was behind the room where Mr. and Mrs. Jarmey practically lived. It was dark and cold. Mrs. Grail was making a pudding.

'Good-morning, my dear!' she said, nodding

several times. 'Better now? I hoped you wouldn't be down yet, but I suppose you couldn't sleep for the sunshine. I don't think you ought to sit here.'

'Oh, but I'm going to help you. Please give me something to do. Shall I clean these knives?'

'The idea! Charlotte 'll be down to do those directly. If you really don't find it too cold here, you may tell me something about the concert.'

'Yes, I'll tell you, but I must work at the same time. I want to, I *must*! Yes, I shall do the knives. Please don't be cross!'

She was bent on it; Mrs. Grail quietly acquiesced. For ten minutes Thyrza wrought strenuously at the knife-board, speaking only a few words. Then the girl Charlotte made her appearance.

'Now, Thyrza,' Mrs. Grail said, 'if you really want something to do, suppose you go and dust upstairs. You haven't dusted yet, have you, Charlotte?'

'No, mum, not yet.'

Thyrza rubbed away for a minute longer, then agreed to go up to the lighter work. Her head had not profited by the violent exercise.

Dusting is an occupation not incompatible with reverie. How hard it was to keep her mind from the subject which she had determined not to think of! As often as her face turned to the sunlight, that longing came back.

Mrs. Grail joined her presently. We know that the old lady had no fondness for domestic bustle. She sat

down, and at length persuaded Thyrza to do the same.

At half-past eleven Mrs. Grail said :

'My dear, I think you ought to go out for a little, while it's so bright. I'm not at all sure that the sun 'll last till dinner-time; it's getting rather uncertain. Just go into Kennington Road and back.'

Thyrza shook her head.

'Not this morning. I'm a little tired.'

'Yes, but it'll make you feel more cheerful, and you'll have an appetite for dinner, which I'm sure you haven't had for a week and more. How ever you live on the few mouthfuls you eat is a wonder to me. You ought to have half an hour's walk every day, indeed you ought.'

'Yes, but not this morning. No, indeed I can't go out now, Mrs. Grail. Please don't ask me!'

'But, my child, why shouldn't you? Well, well, of course I won't say another word, if you really don't want to. Why, I declare, you're crying? What is it, my pretty? What is it, Thyrza?'

'Nothing. Don't look at me!'

It was said half irritably. The old lady became silent. Thyrza dried her eyes, and said:

'I didn't mean to speak to you like that, Mrs. Grail.'

'I know you didn't, dear. Your nerves are out of order.'

'Do you really wish me to go out?'

'Not for the world, if you'd rather not. But I want to see you with a brighter face, my child. I thought it would do you good.'

'Yes, perhaps it will. I'll go for just a quarter of an hour. Don't lay the cloth; I want to do it. Promise you'll let me, Mrs. Grail.'

'Thyrza, it'll be very nice when you begin to call me by another name.'

'Shall I call you that now?' Thyrza replied, quickly. 'Just when we're alone, I mean? Shall I?'

'If you will, pet.'

'Yes, I should like to. You shall be "mother" after this.'

They kissed each other. The young fair face touching the old wrinkled one; a picture to break the heart with grief for all that are born.

Again her hands trembled as she put on her jacket and her hat. It was sorely against her will to go forth, yet desire called to her from the sunlit ways. Slowly down the stairs, slowly to the end of Walnut Tree Walk.

Look at that white billow of cloud on its fathomless ocean! Even now there were clouds like that high up over Eastbourne. One such had hung above her as she drove with Mrs. Ormonde up Beachy Head. At this moment the sea was singing; this breeze, which swept the path of May, made foam flash upon the pebbled shore. Sky and water met on that line of mystery; far away and beyond was the coast of France.

More quickly now. Whither was she tending? She had at first kept southwards, straight along Kennington Road; now she had crossed, and was turning into a street which might—only might—conduct her round into Brook Street. Desire was in her feet; she could no longer check them; she must hasten on whithersoever they led.

Oh, why had she left the house! Why had Mrs. Grail—a cruel mother—bidden her go forth when her will was to stay, and work, and forget! Could she not stop, even now, and turn?

She stopped. Was it likely that he would be there this morning? No, not very likely. He would finish all the books yesterday. Yet others might have been brought.

If he would give her one long look—the look for which she fainted—then that should be the end. That should be the very end. She would not play with danger after that. For now she knew that it was danger; that thought of Lyddy had made everything terribly clear. He would never know anything of what had been in her foolish heart, and it would cost him nothing to look once at her with a rich, kind look. He was all kindness. He had done, was doing, things such as no other man in his position ever thought of. She would like to tell him the immeasurable worship with which his nobleness inspired her; but the right words would never come to her, and the wrong would be so near her lips. No, one look for him, and therewith an end.

The library was within sight; she had walked very quickly. If he should not be there! Her hand was on the door; the bitterness of it if the door proved to be locked.

It was open. She was in the little entrance hall. At the door of the library itself she stood listening.

'Was that a sound of someone within? No, only the beat of her own heart, the throb which seemed as if it must kill her. She *could* not open the door! She had not the strength to stand. The pain, the pain!

Yet she had turned the handle, and had entered. He was in the act of placing volumes on the shelves. She moved forward and he looked round.

That was not the look she desired. Surprise at first, surprise blent with pleasure; but then a gravity which was all but disapproval.

Yet he gave his hand.

'Good-morning, Miss Trent!' The voice was scrupulously subdued, as inflexionless as he could make it. 'I am still at my secret work, you see. When I went away for lunch yesterday something prevented me from returning, so I came down again this morning.'

'You have got them nearly all put up.'

She could not face him, but kept her eyes on the almost empty cases.

'Yes. But I expect some more this afternoon.'

He walked away from her, with books in his hands. Thyrza felt ashamed. What must he think of her? It was almost rude to come in this way—without shadow

of excuse. Doubtless he was punishing her by this cold manner. Yet he could not unsay what he had said yesterday; and his recognition of her just outside the Hall last night had been so friendly. She felt that her mode of addressing him had been too unceremonious; the 'Sir' of their former intercourse seemed demanded again. Yet to use it would be plain disregard of his request.

Must she speak another word and go? That would be very hard. Shame and embarrassment notwithstanding, it was so sweet to be here; nay, the shame itself was luxury.

He said:

'I am so sorry I haven't a chair to offer you. If I put the top on this box? That is a very rude sort of seat, but——'

Then he wished her to remain a little? Or was it mere politeness, which modesty should direct her to meet with similar refusal? It was so hard that she did not know what was proper, how she was expected to behave.

In the meantime, the seat was improvised. He asked her with a smile if she would take it.

'Thank you, Mr. Egremont. I'm afraid I mustn't stay. Or only a minute.'

He glanced at the inner door, leading to the house. Had some sound come thence?

Thyrza seated herself. With one hand she held the edge of the box nervously. Her eyes were bent down-

wards. Egremont again walked away from her. On returning, he said, in the same almost expressionless tone:

'I hope you enjoyed the concert last night?'

This was what she had wished, that he would speak of the concert.

'I did, so very much,' she replied.

And, as she spoke, her face was lifted. He was regarding her, and did not at once avert his eyes. For an appreciable space of time they looked at each other.

Was she then satisfied? Could she leave him now and draw a hard line between this hour and the future? Less satisfied than ever. His gaze was a mystery; it seemed so cold, and yet, and yet—what did it suggest to her? That just observable tremor on his lip; that slight motion of the forehead, those things spoke to her miraculously sharpened sense, and yet she could not interpret their language. It was very far from the look she had yearned for, yet perhaps it affected her more profoundly than a frank gaze of kindness would have done.

He moved a little, again glancing at the inner door.

'I was there myself,' were his next words.

'Yes, I saw you. In the Hall, I mean; not only afterwards.'

Uttered without forethought, she desired to say that and had said it.

'Did you?' he said, more coldly still.

'Gilbert pointed you out to us.'

It was true, and it involved a falsehood. Egremont happened to regard her as she spoke, and at once a blush came to her cheeks. To what was she falling? Why did she tell untruths without the least need? She could not understand the motive which had impelled her to that.

Egremont had a distinct frown on his face. It was as though he read her deceit and despised her for it. Thyrza added, confusedly:

'My sister went with us. She hadn't meant to, but Gilbert persuaded her at last.'

'Do you remember which piece you liked best?'

'No, I couldn't say. It was all so beautiful. I liked the songs so much.'

'But Mr. Grail must take you to hear better singers than those.'

'Weren't they good?' she asked, in astonishment.

'Certainly not bad, but not really excellent.'

He mentioned one or two world-echoed names, and spoke in particular of a concert shortly to be given, at which such singers would be heard.

'You have heard them?' Thyrza asked, gazing at him.

'Several times.'

'I should be almost afraid.'

He thought it a wonderful word to come from this untaught girl. Again their eyes met. He laughed.

'Something like my own feeling when I got out at

Niagara Station, and began to walk towards the Falls. I dreaded the first sight of them.'

He was purposely turning it to a jest. He durst not reply to her in her own mood. And he saw that she had not understood.

'You have heard of Niagara?'

'No, Mr. Egremont. Will you tell me about it?'

He made a very brief pause, yet sufficient to make Thyrza fear. Did he despise her ignorance, or did he think her troublesome? Yet he began to explain, and was soon speaking much more freely, almost as he had spoken that evening in the Grails' room, when he told of his sea-experiences.

What things he had looked upon! How vast the world was, and what marvels it contained! When he ceased, she could say nothing. If she had fallen at his feet, it would have been but the natural prompting of her spirit.

He ended somewhat abruptly, and went to the shelves with books. Thyrza rose and followed him. He looked back, strangely, as if startled.

'May I look at the books I put up yesterday?' she asked, timorously.

'Ah yes! There is old Gibbon, our corner-stone. He hasn't much elbow-room now.'

Again he laughed. The laugh troubled her; she preferred him to be grave.

'And some more books are coming to-day?' she said.

'Yes, this afternoon.'

'Mr. Egremont, may I come and help to put up a few to-morrow morning?'

Again her tongue uttered words in defiance of her self. She could not believe it when the words were spoken.

Egremont perused the floor. The slight frown had returned.

'But perhaps I shall be in your way,' she continued, hastily. 'I didn't think. I am troublesome.'

'Indeed you are not at all, Miss Trent. I should be very glad. If—if you are sure you can spare the time?'

'I can quite well. I do a little work for Mrs. Grail, but that doesn't take anything like all the morning.'

A word was on his tongue. He was about to say that perhaps it would be as well, after all, to tell Grail, and for Thyrza to ask the latter's permission. He even began to speak, but hesitated, ceased.

'Shall I come at this same time?' Thyrza inquired, her voice almost failing her.

'I shall be here at about eleven; certainly by half-past.'

'Then I will come. I shall be so glad to help.'

A pronoun was lost; something prevented its utterance. Egremont made no reply. Thyrza found power to hold her hand out and take leave. How often they seemed to have held each other's hand!

CHAPTER VII.

MISCHIEF AFOOT.

It would have been a remarkable thing if Egremont had succeeded, even for a day or two, in keeping secret his work at the library. The vulgar in Lambeth are not a jot less diligent in prying and gossip than are their kin in Mayfair. And chance is wont to be mischief-making all the world over.

When Mr. Bower passed the library in the dinner-hour on Monday, and, after seeing Thyrza Trent come out, forthwith observed Mr. Egremont standing within at the window, his mind busied itself with the coincidence very much as it might have been expected to do. When he reached home he privately reported the little incident to his wife. They looked at each other, and Mr. Bower lowered first one eyelid, then the other.

'Is Grail still at his work?' Mrs. Bower inquired.

'Safe enough. He goes on till Saturday. Ackroyd told me so yesterday.'

'And her sister's at work, too?'

'Safe enough.'

'Is the workmen there still?'

'No, they're all out. Safe enough.'

Mr. Bower seemed to find a satisfaction in repeating the significant phrase. He chuckled disagreeably.

'It looks queer,' remarked his wife, with a certain contemptuousness.

'It looks uncommon queer. I wonder whether old Mrs. Butterfield happened to be safe likewise.' He nodded. 'I'll look in and have a word with the old lady to-night, eh?'

Mrs. Butterfield's husband, some years deceased, had been a fellow-workman with Bower. The latter, prying about the school-building as soon as he heard that Egremont was going to convert it into a library, had discovered that the caretaker was known to him. There seemed at the time no particular profit to be derived from the circumstance, but Mr. Bower regarded it much as he would have done a piece of lumber that might have come into his possession, as a thing just to be kept in mind, if perchance some use for it should some day be discovered. It is this habit of thought that helps the Bower species to become petty capitalists. We call it thrift, and—respecting public opinion—we do not refuse our admiration.

On Monday evening, about eight o'clock, Mr. Bower went up to the house-door in the rear of the building, and knocked. The door was opened about two inches, and an aged voice asked who was there.

'It's me, Mrs. Butterfield — Bower,' was the pleasantly modulated reply.

The door opened a little wider.

'Does Mr. Egremont happen to be here?' the visitor went on to ask.

'No, Mr. Bower, he ain't here, nor likely to come again to-night, I shouldn't think.'

'Never mind. I dare say you'd let me have a look in, just to see how things is goin' on. I saw him at the window as I passed at dinner-time, and we just nodded to each other, but I hadn't time to stop.'

The old woman admitted him. In the house was an exultant savour of frying onions; a hissing sound came from the sitting-room.

'Cooking your supper, eh, Mrs. Butterfield?' said Bower, with genial familiarity. 'Why, that's right: make yourself comfortable. Don't you fuss about, now; I'll sit down here; I like the smell.'

Mrs. Butterfield was not at all the same woman with this visitor that she was with strangers. For one thing, he brought back to her the memory of days when she had possessed a home of her own, and had not yet been soured by ill-hap; then again, Bower belonged to her own class, for all his money saved up and his pomposities of manner. There is a free-masonry between the pure-blooded vulgar proletariat; such are ever ready in recognition of each other, and their suspicion of all above them, whether by birth or by nature, is a sense of the utmost keenness. Mrs. Butterfield varied somewhat from the type, inasmuch as she did not care to cringe before her superiors; but

that was an accident; in essentials of feeling she and Bower were at one.

The table was half covered with a dirty cloth, on which stood a loaf of bread (plateless), a small dish ready to receive the fry, and a jug of beer. In the midst of the newly painted and papered room, which seemed ready to receive furniture of a more elegant kind than that of working-class homes, these things had an incongruity.

'And how does the world use *you*, Mrs. Butterfield, ma'am?' Bower asked, as he settled his bulky body on the small chair.

'I earn my bed and my victuals, Mr. Bower,' was the reply, as the old woman stirred her hissing mess with a fork.

'And a thing to be proud of at your age, ma'am.'

From such friendly dialogue, Bower gradually turned the talk to Egremont, of whom he spoke at first as a respected intimate. Observation of his collocutor led him shortly to alter his tone a little. When he had heard that books were already arriving, he remarked:

'That's as much as to say that you'll soon be turned out, Mrs. Butterfield. Well, I call it hard at your age, ma'am. Now if Egremont had acted like a gentleman and had offered *me* to be librarian, you'd still have kept your place here. I don't want to say disagreeable things, but if ever there was a mean and indecent action, it was when he passed over *me* and gave the place to a stranger. Why, Mrs. Butterfield, he has to thank me

for everything! But for me he'd never have had a soul to hear his lectures. Well, well, it don't matter. And what do you think o' the young girl as is coming to keep house here after you?'

Mrs. Butterfield was turning out her supper into the dish. She gave him a peculiar look.

'When's she goin' to be wed?' was her question in reply.

'Next Monday.'

'And does the man as is goin' to marry her know as she comes here to meet this young gent?'

'She comes to meet him? *Does* she, now? Tut—tut—tut! But we needn't think harm, Mrs. Butterfield—though you can tell from her face she'll need a good deal of looking after. And does she come regular, now?'

The old woman confessed that she only knew of two meetings, with a very long interval, but she hinted that the first had taken place under circumstances very suspicious; in fact, that it was obviously an appointment. And this morning, as soon as she knew of Thyrza's presence in the library (by the borrowing of the hammer), she had kept a secret espial through the key-hole of the inner door, with the result that she witnessed the two chatting together in a way sufficiently noteworthy, considering the difference of their stations.

The matter having been made to bear all the fruit it would in malevolent discussion, Mr. Bower left the old woman at her supper, and with a candle went to

explore the state of the library. He did not remain long, for the big room was very cold, and shortly after rejoining the caretaker he bade her the friendliest good-evening.

'I consider you've done very right to tell me this,' he said, as she went to let him out. 'In *my* opinion it's something as Grail ought to know. You keep an eye open to-morrow morning; depend upon it, you're doing a good work. I shouldn't wonder if I look in to-morrow night. And I dare say you could do with a nice bit of cheese, eh? I'll see if I can pick a bit out of the shop.'

On Tuesday night he repeated his visit, bringing half a pound of very strong American in his pocket. He heard a shocking story. Thyrza had again been to the library, and so secretly that but for her station at the key-hole Mrs. Butterfield would have known nothing of it.

'Well, well, now! Tut—tut—tut!' commented portly Mr. Bower. 'To think! You never *can* trust these young men as have more money than they know what to do with! But I didn't think it of Egremont. That's the kind of fellow as comes to preach to the working-man and tell him of his faults! Bah! Well, I'm not one for going about spreading stories. Grail must take his chance. Perhaps it 'ud be as well, Mrs. Butterfield, if *you* kept this little affair quiet—just between you and me, you know. There's no knowing. —Eh? A time may come.—Eh? It's none of our

business *just now*.—Eh? You understand, Mrs. Butterfield? It might be as well to keep an eye open to the end of the week.'

Mr. Bower, on the way home, turned into his club, just to drink a glass of whisky at the club price. In the reading-room were a few men occupied with newspapers or in chat. In a corner, reading his favourite organ of 'free thought,' sat Luke Ackroyd.

Bower got his glass of spirits, brought it into the reading-room, and sat down by Ackroyd.

'So our friend Egremont's begun to get his books together,' he began.

'Has he?'

Luke was indifferent. Of late he had entered upon a new phase of his mental trouble. He was averse from conversation, shrank from his old companions, seemed to have resumed studious habits. It had got about that he was going to marry Totty Nancarrow, but he refused to answer questions on the subject. Banter he met with so grim a countenance that the facetious soon left him to himself. He no longer drank, that was evident. But his face was pale, thin, and unwholesome. One would have said that just now he was more seriously unhappy than he had been throughout his boisterous period.

Bower, after one or two glances at him, lowered his voice to say:

'I can't think it's altogether the right thing for Thyrza Trent to be there every morning helping him.

Of course you and me know as it's all square, but other people might—eh? Grail ought to think of that—eh?'

Now it had seemed to Mr. Bower, in his native wisdom, that any scandal about Thyrza would tickle Ackroyd immensely. He imagined Luke bearing a deep grudge against the girl and against Grail—for he knew that the friendship between Luke and the latter had plainly come to an end. In his love of gossip, he could not keep the story to himself, and he thought that Ackroyd would be the safest of confidants. In fact, though he spoke to Mrs. Butterfield as if he had conceived some deep plan of rascality, the man was not capable of anything above petty mischief. He liked to pose in secret as a sort of transpontine schemer; that flattered his self-importance; but his ambition did not seriously go beyond making trouble in a legitimate way. He did indeed believe that something scandalous was going on, and it would be all the better fun to have Ackroyd join him with malicious pleasure in a campaign against reputations. Luke was a radical of the reddest; surely it would delight him to have a new cry against the patronising capitalist.

The malicious are perforce the very worst judges of human nature, for only charity sees far into another's heart. Malice, moreover, invariably implies a defect of intellect.

Ackroyd, having heard that whisper, looked up from his paper slowly. And at once Bower knew that he had made a great miscalculation.

'Other people might think *what*?' Luke asked, with gravity passing into anger.

'Well, well; you must take it as I meant it, old man.' Bower was annoyed, and added: 'No doubt Egremont likes to have a pretty gyurl to talk to every morning. I don't blame him. Still, if I was Grail——'

'What the devil do you mean, Bower? What's all this about?'

Ackroyd clearly knew nothing. The other recovered some of his confidence.

'Well, you needn't let it go further. It's no good thinking the worst of people. For all I know Grail sends her to help with the books, just because he can't go himself.'

Luke laid down the paper, and said quietly:

'Will you tell me all about it? It's the first I've heard. What's going on?'

Bower brought out his narrative, even naming the authority for it. He took sips of whisky in between. Ackroyd heard in silence, and seemed to dismiss his indignation.

'There's nothing in all that,' he said at length. 'Of course Grail knows all about it. This Mrs. What's-her-name seems to have too little to do.'

'Well, there's no knowing.'

'And you're going to tell this story all over Lambeth?'

'Why, didn't I ask you to keep it quiet?'

'Yes, Bower, you did. And I mean to. And—

look here! If you'd been a man of my own age, for all we've known each other a goodish time, I should have sent you spinning half across the room before now. So that's plain language, and you must make what you like of it!'

Therewith Luke thrust back his chair and walked out of the room.

He did not pause till he was some distance from the club. His blood was tingling. But it was not in anger that he at length stood still and asked himself whither he should go. His heart had begun to sink with fear.

Had he done wisely in insulting Bower? The fellow would take his revenge in an obvious way. That calumny would be in every one's mouth by the morrow.

And yet, as if that would not have come about in any case! How long was anything likely to remain a secret that was known in Mrs. Bower's shop? No, it made no difference.

Such stories going round with regard to Thyrza Trent! What was the meaning of it? Had there been some imprudence on Grail's part, some thoughtlessness in keeping with his character, which had in it so little of the everyday man? It was a monstrous thing that opportunities should have been given to that lying old woman!

He walked on, in the direction of home. There was a hideous voice at his ear. Suppose Grail in truth knew nothing about those meetings in the library? How explain the first of them, two months ago?

He altered his course, and, without settled purpose, hurried toward Walnut Tree Walk. As he drew near to the house he saw someone about to enter. He ran forward. It was Gilbert.

'How does the library get on?' he asked, with an abruptness which surprised Grail.

'Oh, all the carpenter's work is finished.'

'Any books come yet?'

'No, not yet.'

'Ah! Good-night!'

He passed on, leaving Gilbert still in surprise, for it was perhaps the first word Ackroyd had spoken to him concerning the library.

Luke began to run, and did not cease until he was in Brook Street, in front of the library. He tried to look in at the windows, but found that blinds were drawn. A policeman passed and scrutinised him.

'Do you know whether anyone lives on these premises?' Luke asked at once.

He excited suspicion, but after a short dialogue the constable showed him the approach to the caretaker's house. He knocked at the door several times; at length it was barely opened.

'Is that Mrs. Butterfield?'

'Yes. What may you want?'

'I want to know, if you please, if Mr. Egremont called here to-day and left a message for Mr. Smith about some books.'

'He's been here, but he left no message.'

'Was he here long?'

'All the morning.'

'Putting books on the shelves?'

'Yes.'

'Thank you. If there was no message, it's all right.'

Luke went off. In Kennington Road he again stood still. He felt chilled and wretched to the heart's core. Thyrza! Thryza Trent! Was it possible?

He moved on. This time it was to Newport Street. Half-past ten had just gone; would Totty be up still? Whether or no, he must see her. He rang the bell which was a summons to her part of the house. Bunce opened.

'I want to see Miss Nancarrow,' Luke said to him in a low voice. 'Will you please knock at her door? I must see her.'

Totty came down immediately. She had her hat on and a shawl thrown about her.

'What ever is it?' she asked.

'Just come a little way off, Totty; I want to speak to you.'

She accompanied him to the dark side of the street, and, having got her there, he could find no fitting word with which to begin. He had no intention of telling her what he had heard and what he had discovered for himself, but she was a close friend of Thyrza's and might know or suspect something; moreover, she was a good girl, a girl thoroughly to be trusted, he felt sure of her. Perhaps a hint would be enough to induce her

to share a secret with him, when she understood what his suspicions pointed to.

'Totty——'

'Yes, you frighten me. What is it?'

'Have you seen Thyrza Trent lately?'

'Why?'

She tried to read his face through the darkness. Her yesterday's conversation with Thyrza was vivid in her mind. Suspicion was irritated at the sound of Thyrza's name on Luke's tongue.

'Totty, I want to ask you something.' He spoke with deepest earnestness, taking her hand. 'You won't keep anything from me, now? I want to know if Thyrza has talked to you about—about her marriage.'

'Why do you want to know that?' the girl asked, in a hard voice.

'I'll speak plainer, Totty. Be a good girl, Totty dear! Tell me what I want to know! Has she ever said anything to make you think that—that she liked any one better than Grail?'

What a coil was here! She had pulled her hand away, furious with him for his shamelessness. Yet self-respect did not allow her to speak vehemently.

'It seems to me,' she said, 'you'd better go and ask her.'

He hung in doubt. Totty added, with more show of feeling:

'Thyrza Trent's a little fool. You may tell her I said so, if you like. If you know all about it, what do

you come bothering me for at this time o' night? I'm not going to be mixed up in such things, so I tell you! And there's an end of it!'

She left him. He stood and saw her re-enter the house.

Then it was true. 'If you know all about it,' . . . 'I'm not going to be mixed up in such things.' . . . Totty had been told, either by Thyrza herself or by someone already spreading the story. The story was true.

He was struck with weakness. Sweat broke out from all his body. Nothing he had ever heard had seemed to him so terrible. A girl like Thyrza! He had held her honesty as sure as the rising of day out of night.

Half an hour later he sat in his bedroom writing:

'Dear Miss Trent,—I want very much to see you. I will wait in Kennington Road, opposite the end of your street, from eight o'clock to-morrow night (Wednesday). Please do come. I *must* see you, and I wish no one to know of our meeting.—Yours truly,

'Luke Ackroyd.'

He addressed this to Lydia, 'Miss Lydia Trent,' that there might be no mistake, and went out to post it. But at the letter-box he altered his intention. If it was delivered by the postman, Thyrza would see it; it would lead to questionings.

He determined to deliver it at the hat factory in the morning, with his own hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOOD-BYE.

Left alone, after Thyrza's second visit to him in the library, Egremont had no mind to continue his task. He idled about for a while, read half a page in a volume he took out of the box at hazard, then put on his overcoat and went out by the front door, which he locked behind him with the key he carried for his own convenience.

He was wishing that he had not fallen into this piece of folly. As long as no one but Grail and himself was concerned, it mattered nothing; to have established a secret intercourse with Thyrza was a result of his freak for which he was not at all prepared. And he could not see his way out of the difficulty. He might go and see Grail, and let him know what he was doing, but that would involve deliberate concealment of Thyrza's visits. He could not speak of them; he had no right to do so. If Thyrza on her part told all about it—why, that would make it, for him, still more unpleasant. And Thyrza was not likely to do that; he felt assured of it. Precisely; that meant that hence-

forth there would be a secret understanding between himself and Gilbert's wife. Most certainly he desired nothing of the kind.

A weak way of putting it. Walter dreaded anything of the kind. Two days—Monday, Tuesday—and in that brief time the whole face of the future had changed for him. On Sunday evening he had sat thinking over his future relations with Grail and Thyrza. The fact that he consciously brought himself to reflect upon the subject of course proved that it involved certain doubts and difficulties for him, but in half an hour he believed that he had put his mind in order. Thyrza interested him—why not say it out, as he was bent on understanding himself? She interested him more vitally than any girl he had ever known. Very possibly he saw her in the light of illusion; should his opportunities grant him a completer knowledge of her, he might not improbably discover that after all she was but a pretty girl of the people, attractive in a great measure owing to her very deficiencies. He would very likely come to laugh at himself for having thought that her value was above that of Annabel Newthorpe. But he had to deal with the present, and in the present Thyrza seemed to him all gold. Had there existed no Gilbert Grail, he would have been in love with Thyrza.

The plain truth. But Gilbert Grail did exist, and in Walter Egremont existed a sense of honour, a sense of shame. Should he by word or deed throw blight

upon Gilbert Grail's future, he felt that all the good of his own life would be at an end. He could not face man or woman again.

It came to this, then. Henceforth he must remember that, however near his intimacy with Gilbert, there must be no playing at friendship with Gilbert's wife. Friendship was impossible. That gold-haired girl had a power over him which, if ever so slightly and thoughtlessly exercised, might drive him into acts of insanity. He had seen her three times—this is Sunday night, remember—and yet the thought of Annabel was like a pale ghost beside his thought of her. He had till now suspected that his nature was not framed for passion; a few weeks had taught him that, if he allowed passion to take hold upon him, no part of his soul could escape the flame.

Two days had passed since then. On two successive mornings he had been alone with Thyrza; one evening he had spent at a concert, for the mere sake of being where Thyrza was, and feeling emotions such as he knew she would feel. 'No playing at friendship with Gilbert's wife.' And he had himself held out his hand to her, had asked her to address him familiarly, had talked of things which brought them into closer communion, had—yes—had bidden her keep their interviews a secret from Gilbert. Had insanity begun?

A piece of folly; nothing else. As he walked towards Westminster, he viewed the situation, or tried to view it, as it is put in the second paragraph of this

chapter. He had got into a very disagreeable position; he really must find some becoming way out of it; Thyrza was a silly girl to come a second time; of course the appointment for the following morning must not be kept. There was no harm in it all, none whatever, but——

Bah! The worst had come about; the miserable fate had declared itself; he was in love with Thyrza Trent!

He entered the Abbey. He seated himself in a shadowed place. Alone? Whose then was the voice that spoke to him unceasingly, and the hand which he was holding, which stirred his blood so with its warmth? 'Put aside every thought of the living fact; say that there is no Gilbert Grail in the world. You and I—you, Thyrza, my sweet-eyed, my beautiful—sit here side by side and hold each other's hands. Your voice has become very low and reverent, as befits the place, as befits the utterance of love such as this you say you bear me. What can I answer you, my golden one? Only, in voice low as your own, breathe that the world is barren but for you, that to the last drop of my heart's blood I love and worship you! A poor girl, a worker with her hands, untaught—you say that? A woman, pure of soul, with loveliness for your heritage, with possibilities imaginable in every ray of your eyes, in every note of the rare music of your voice!'

Even so. In the meantime, this happens to be Westminster Abbey, where a working man, one Gilbert

Grail, has often walked and sought solace from the bitterness of his accursed lot, where he has thought of a young girl who lives above him in the house, and who, as often as she passes him, is like a gleam of southern sky somehow slipped into the blank hideousness of a London winter. Hither he has doubtless come to try and realise that fate has been so merciful to him that he longs to thank some unknown deity and cry that all is good. Hither he will come again, with one whom he calls his wife——

Walter rose and went forth, went home.

He had not been ten minutes in his room, when a servant appeared, to tell him that a lady had called and desired to see him, her name Mrs. Ormonde.

She came in, looking bright and noble as ever, giving him both her hands.

'I am glad to see you. I did not expect you to-day. Will you sit down?'

He did not know what he said. Mrs. Ormonde examined him, and for a moment kept silence.

'You have come up to-day?'

'Yes. I have come here direct from the station, because I wished to make use of you. But it seems to me that the doctor would have been a more fitting visitor. What has come to you, Walter?'

'It is true. I am not well. But always well enough to desire to serve you.'

'Though not, seemingly, to bear in mind my first wish. Why have you not answered my last letter, as I

particularly asked you to? If you were ill, why have you remained here alone? I am angry with you.'

He was reflecting, as absorbedly as if she had not been in the room. She was his friend, if any man had one; she was of the priceless women who own both heart and brain. Should he speak out and tell her everything? If he did so, he was saved. He would leave town. Grail should come back, after the wedding holiday, and get on with the arrangement of the library under written directions. Illness would explain such a step. In a month, all would be right again.

'Walter!'

Her eyes were searching him. Did she half know? He had written so foolishly in the letter about Thyrza. But it was impossible that she could divine such a thing. The circumstances made it too incredible.

'Tell me,' she went on. 'What has caused your illness?'

No, he could not. She would scorn him. And he could not bear to sink in her estimation. He could not seem childish before her.

'I have no idea,' he answered. 'Perhaps I have so accustomed myself to rambling over land and sea, that a year without change is proving too much for me. I must have the library started, and then be off—anywhere—a voyage to New Zealand!'

Mrs. Ormonde showed disappointment. She did not believe that this was the truth, even as he knew it. The truth was glimmering in the rear of her thoughts,

but she would not allow it to come forward; in plain daylight it was really difficult to entertain. Still, as an instinct it was there, instinct supported even by certain pieces of evidence.

'You wish to go away? To go a distance—to be away for some time?'

'Yes.' He did not meet her look. 'I don't think I shall get back my health till I do that. Don't let us talk of it.'

'What are you doing at the library?'

'Putting up books.'

'With Mr. Grail?'

'No. He doesn't leave the factory till the end of the week.'

'Then leave the place as it stands, and come to Eastbourne with me to-morrow.'

'I'm afraid I——'

'And so am *I* afraid,' she interrupted him gravely. 'I wish you to come to Eastbourne. I wish you to!'

'No, not to Eastbourne. I have reasons.'

Her eyes fell.

'But I promise you,' he continued, 'that I will leave town to-morrow. I promise you. Don't think me unkind that I refuse to come with you. I will go to Jersey again; it suits me. I'll stay there till Grail comes back with his wife, and then see if I feel well enough to come and go on with the work.'

'Very well,' Mrs. Ormonde replied, slowly.

'Do you doubt my word?' he asked, moving forward to her.

'We are not so far as that, Walter.'

'And now tell me what I am to do for you.'

She hesitated, but only for a moment.

'I wish you to see Mr. Bunce for me. Do you meet him nowadays?'

'Not just now, but I can see him any time.'

'I want to arrange, if possible, to keep his child with me for some time, for a year or more. It is not impossible that her disease might be checked if she lived at Eastbourne, but in London she will very soon die. I should like to see Mr. Bunce myself, and I thought you might be able to arrange for a meeting between us. My idea is this: I shall tell him that the girl can make herself useful in the house, and that I wish to pay her for her services. The money would of course go to him, and he might use it to get help in his home. Bessie, the child, has explained to me all the difficulties in the way of her remaining with me; they are heightened by her father's character, as you can understand. Now do you think he would see me? He might come to my hotel, or he might come here, or if he allows me, I would go to him.'

'I will arrange it, somehow. Trust me, I will arrange it.'

'You should have said that with a wave of the hand, as omnipotent people do on the stage.'

He laughed.

'There is no feeling miserable with you. Have you not something of that mesmeric power which draws one back into health under a touch?'

'Perhaps. A little. My children sometimes show astonishing improvement, when they get fond of me.'

They talked of various things, but no mention was made of the Newthorpes by either.

'Is Paula back yet?' Mrs. Ormonde asked.

'I have no idea. I am not likely ever to see her again.'

'Oh, yes! When you come back from New Zealand. I shall go and see the Tyrrells this afternoon, I think. I have to dine with friends at Hampstead. When can I have the result of your inquiries?'

'I will come to you to-morrow morning.'

'At ten, please. I have a great deal to get into the day; and you yourself must be off by noon.'

'By noon I shall be.'

This visit had been happily timed. Sympathy was essential to Egremont as often as he suffered from the caprices of his temperament, and in grave trouble it was a danger for him to be left companionless. He was highly nervous, and the tumult of his imagination affected his bodily state in a degree uncommon in men, though often seen in delicately organised women. When Mrs. Ormonde left him he felt relieved in mind, but physically so brought down that he stretched himself upon the sofa. He remained there for more than an hour.

How much better, he was saying to himself, not to have told Mrs. Ormonde! That would have been a greater folly than anything yet. No irreparable harm was as yet done; to confess a mere state of mind would have been to fill his friend with fears wholly groundless, and to fix a lasting torture in his own memory. It would have been to render impossible any future work in Lambeth. Yet upon the continuance of such work practically depended Grail's future. To Gilbert Grail he had solemn duties to perform. Henceforth the scope of his efforts would be lessened; instead of exerting himself for a vague populace, it would really be for Grail alone that he worked. Grail he must and would aid to the end. It was a task worthy of a man who was not satisfied with average aims. He would crush this tyrannous passion in his heart, cost him what struggle it might, and the reward would be a noble one.

He rose at length with a haggard face. It was long past the hour at which he usually took his mid-day meal, and he had no appetite for food. He went to a restaurant, however, and made pretence of eating; thence into the smoking-room, where he spent the time till five o'clock, drinking coffee and reading papers. His only object now was to kill time.

At half-past eight he was in Lambeth. He knew Bunce's address, but had never before been in Newport Street. It was his habit to discover places by the aid of a map alone, and thus guided, he found the house.

Totty Nancarrow happened to be on the stairs when he knocked; she had just come in. She ran down to the door. Egremont inquired for Bunce, and was told he was not at home, and would not be till very late.

'Do you know when I could be sure to find him here?'

'Yes,' replied Totty, who was able to guess at Egremont's identity, and examined him with some interest. 'He'll be here to-morrow after eight. He's on a job in Hammersmith, working late. But to-morrow's the last day, and he's sure to be back by eight o'clock.'

'He leaves early in the morning, I suppose?'

'At half-past five.'

'Thank you. I will call to-morrow evening. Could you let him know that, from Mr. Egremont? I wish to see him particularly.'

'I'll let him know, sir.'

This was a mishap. It would necessitate another whole day in London.

He called upon Mrs. Ormonde next morning, at the hotel which it was her wont to use when in town for a day or two. At first she was strongly opposed to his waiting just on this account.

'I cannot go till I have done this for you,' he said firmly. 'I shall see Bunce to-night, and go away to-morrow. You must let me have my way in this.'

And he desired to remain for a weightier reason than the apparent one. It was this morning, Wednes-

day, that Thyrza would expect to find him at the library. She must be disappointed, and he would prove to himself that he was yet strong enough to resist, that he had not so lost self-control that his only safety lay in flight.

The strength was that of a man who combats desperately with some ailment which threatens his life. 'Am I then of those who have no will power? Will is that whereby men raise themselves above the multitude; let me give proofs now that my claims are not those of a charlatan.' He passed six hours in his room.

Thyrza would go to the library at eleven, or a little after. She was there now. She would find the front door closed against her. She would go round to the house, and make inquiry of Mrs. Butterfield. Perhaps she would wait for him.

Yes, she would wait for him. She was sitting in the library, on the chest which he had offered her for a seat, alone, disappointed.

Disappointed. More than that. Why had she come on Tuesday, the second morning? Why had she desired to come yet again? Had he read her face truly?

He knew, he knew with miserable certainty, that she did not love Grail. She had not known what love was; a child, so merely a child! But when love once was born in her, would it not be for life and death?

He was lying on the sofa again, his eyes fixed on

the ceiling. Moisture stood upon his forehead, formed into beads and ran off. His torment was that of the rack. He believed that Thyrza had at least begun to love him. Madman that he was, he *hoped* it! Thyrza's love was a thing for which one would dare uttermost perdition, the blind leap once taken. Yes, but that leap he would not take; he was on firm ground; he knew what honour meant; he acknowledged the sanctity of obligations between man and man.

But if she loved *him*, was it right that she should wed Grail? Obligations, forsooth! Was it not his first duty to save her from a terrible self-sacrifice? What could overrule love? There was time to intervene; four days more, and it would be too late for ever —for ever. What hideous things might result from conscientiousness such as he was now striving to preserve.

'Thyrza! She is waiting there, waiting for *me* to come to her. She trembles at every sound, thinking it *my* footstep. If her anguish be but the shadow of mine——'

He sprang up, ghastly. He had not closed his eyes through the night, but had lain, and walked about the room, in torment. Desire, jealousy, frenzy of first passion, the first passion of his life; no pang was spared him. Oh, how had it grown so suddenly! He had imagined love such as this for some stately woman whose walk was upon the heights of mind—some great artist—some glorious sovereign of culture. Instead of

that, a simple girl who lived by her needle, who spoke faultily. And he loved her with the love which comes to a man but once.

'Thyrza! We will go away together, leave this bleak, seething town, this cold England—go together to the seas and skies of the south. We will forget that England exists, England wrapped in her fogs, crushed beneath the growing burden of social wrong, soon to flame in hideous warfare between luxury and hunger. You shall sing to me; you shall know all joy that life can yield; your beauty shall ripen beneath Italian suns. Together, can we not forget?'

And he—Gilbert Grail? And the good sister, whom she loves so, of whom she speaks with voice so beautifully softened? What life remains for them? Nay, what for the two lovers, when youth departs from them, and, going, beckons passion?

He flung himself upon the couch again, crushing his face into darkness. Better than this were to die. How long can love thus torture?

The evening came at last. Long before it was really time to start for Lambeth, on his visit to Bunce, he began to walk southwards. He was at Westminster Bridge by half-past seven; probably it would be useless to call in Newport Street for another hour. He went down on to the Lambeth Embankment.

It was his hope that no acquaintance would pass this way. Still blameless in fact, he could not help a

fear of being observed; the feeling could not have been stronger if he had come with the express purpose of seeking Thyrza. The air was cold; it blew at moments piercingly from the river. Where the sun had set, there was still a swarthy glow upon the clouds; the gas-lamps gave a haggardness to the banks and the bridges.

He walked at a quick pace; this way, then that. Workmen and women in numbers were hurrying in both directions. Egremont kept his face towards the river, that he might see no one. There was no likelihood that Thyrza would pass. If she did, if she were alone and saw him, he knew she would come up to him and speak.

The bell at Westminster struck out the hour of eight. He turned off the Embankment and went on to Lambeth Bridge, stopping at length to lean on the parapet at the same place where Gilbert had stood and mused one night when his happiness was almost too great to bear. To Egremont the darkening scene was in accord with the wearied misery which made his life one dull pain. London lay beneath the night like a city of hopeless toil, of aimless conflict, of frustration and barrenness. His philosophy was a sham, a spinning of cobwebs for idle hours when the heart is restful and the brain seeks to be amused. He had no more strength to bear the torture of an inassuageable desire than any foolish fellow who knew not the name of culture. He could not look forward to the day of

forgetting; he would not allow himself to believe that he ever could forget.

But it was time now to go on to Newport Street. In Paradise Street, just before the railway arch, he glanced at the Bowers' shop, and dreaded lest Bower should meet him. But he saw no one that he knew before reaching Bunce's abode.

The landlady opened the door. Bunce was at home, and in a moment came down. He returned his visitor's greeting awkwardly, much wondering.

'Could I have a few words with you?' Egremont asked. 'I have come on Mrs. Ormonde's behalf—the lady at the Eastbourne home, you know. I have a message about your little girl.'

'Something happened?' Bunce inquired, in a startled voice.

'No, no; good news, if anything.'

Bunce did not willingly invite Egremont into his poor room, but he felt that he had no choice. He just said: 'Will you come upstairs, sir?' and led the way.

The two children were playing together on the floor; Bunce had been on the point of putting Nelly to bed. In spite of his mood, natural kindness so far prevailed with Egremont that he bent and touched the child's curls. Bunce, with set lips, stood watching; he saw that Egremont had not so much as cast an eye round the room, and that, together with the attention to his child, softened his naturally suspicious frame of mind.

'It's better than coming back to an empty room every night?' Egremont said, looking at the man.

'Yes, sir, it's better—though I don't always think so.'

'These two keep well?'

'Fairly well.'

'There's never nothing the matter with me!' exclaimed young Jack, bluff though shamefaced.

'Nothing except your grammar, you mean, Jack,' replied his father. 'Will you just sit down, sir? I was afraid at first there was something wrong, when you mentioned Mrs. Ormonde.'

Egremont reassured him, and went on to say that Mrs. Ormonde was anxious to see him personally whilst she was in town. He felt it would be better not to explain the nature of the proposal Mrs. Ormonde was going to make, and affected to know nothing more than that she wished to speak of the child's health. Bunce had knitted his brows; his heavy lips took on a fretful sullenness. He knew that it was impossible to meet Egremont with flat refusals, and the prospect of being driven into something he intensely disliked worked him into an inward fume. He gave a great scrape on the floor with one of his heels as if he would have ploughed a track in the boards.

'I'm sorry,' he began, 'I've got no free time worth speaking of. I'm much obliged to the lady. But I don't see how I'm to——'

He wanted to blunder out words of angry im-

patience; his rising choler brought him to a full stop in the middle of the sentence.

Egremont addressed himself in earnest to the task of persuasion. More was involved than mere benefit to the child's health; it was easy to see that Bunce's position was a miserable one, and Mrs. Ormonde, if once she could establish direct relations with the man, would doubtless find many a little way of being useful to him. He put it at length as a personal favour. Bunce again ploughed the floor, then blurted out:

'I'll go, Mr. Egremont. I'm not one to talk to ladies, as you can see yourself, but I can't help that. I shall have to go as I am.'

'Mrs. Ormonde will gladly come here, if you will let her.'

'I'd rather not, if you don't mind, sir.'

'Then it will be simplest if you go to my rooms in Great Russell Street, just by the British Museum. I leave town to-morrow; Mrs. Ormonde will be quite alone to meet you. Could you be there at nine o'clock?'

The appointment was made, Egremont leaving one of his cards to insure recollection of the address. Then he spoke a word or two to the children, and Bunce led him down to the door. They shook hands.

'I shall see you at the library soon, I hope,' Egremont said. 'You must give me your best help in making it known.'

The words sounded so hollow in his own ears that,

as he turned to go along the dark street, he could have laughed at himself scornfully.

As Bunce reascended, someone met and passed him, hurrying with light feet and woman's garments, silently.

'That you, Miss Nancarrow?' he asked, for there was no light on the staircase.

'No,' came a muffled reply. 'Miss Nancarrow isn't in.'

It was the voice of Thyrza Trent. Bunce did not recognise it, for he knew her too slightly.

She had come to the house not long before Egremont. After a day of suffering she wished to speak with Totty. Totty was the only one to whom she *could* speak now; Gilbert, her own Lyddy—them she dreaded. Notwithstanding the terms on which she had parted with her friend on Monday night, she felt an irresistible need of seeing her. It was one way, moreover, of passing a part of the evening away from Walnut Tree Walk. But Totty was out, had not yet come home since her work. Thyrza said she would go upstairs and wait.

She did so. Totty's room was dark and, of course, fireless; but she cared neither for the darkness nor the cold. She groped her way to a chair and sat very still. It was a blessed relief to be here, to be safe from Gilbert and Lyddy for ever so short a time, to sit and clasp the darkness like something loved. She was making up her mind to tell Totty everything. Some-

one she must tell—someone. Not Lyddy; that would be terrible. But Totty had a kind heart, and would keep the secret, perchance could advise in some way. Though what advice could anyone give?

What voice was that? She had heard someone knock at Bunce's door, then heard Bunce go down. He was coming up again, and someone with him—someone who spoke in a voice which made her heart leap. She sprang to the door to listen. Bunce and his companion entered the opposite room, and shut themselves in. Thyrza opened her door as softly as possible, leaned forward, listened. Yes, it was *his* voice!

What was he doing here? He had not come to the library, had not kept his promise. Was it not a promise to her? He had said that she should see him again, should be in the room alone with him, talk with him for one hour—one poor, short hour; and in the end it was denied. Why did he come to see Mr. Bunce? But he was well; nothing had happened to him, which all day had been her dread.

She would not try to overhear their conversation. Enough that he was safe in that next room, never mind for what purpose he came. She was near to him again.

She threw up her hands against the door, and leaned her face, her bosom on it. Her throat was so dry that she felt choking; her heart—poor heart! could it bear this incessant throbbing pain? She swallowed tears, and had some little bodily solace.

But if Totty should come! She hoped to be alone as long as he was there. It was so sweet to be near him, and alone!

And Totty did not come. Of a sudden the opposite door opened. He was leaving, going forth again she knew not whither—only that it was away from her.

Then desire became act. She heard the house-door close, and on the moment sped from the room. She scarcely knew what she said to Bunce on the stairs. Now she was in the street. Which way? There he was, there, at but a little distance.

But she must not approach him here, in this street. Any moment Totty might come—one of the Bowers might pass. She kept at an even remoteness, following him. Into Paradise Street, into High Street, out into Lambeth Road, with the bridge in sight. He meant to go along the Embankment. But it was quieter here. A quickened step, almost a run, and she was by his side.

'Mr. Egremont!'

He stood.

'Mr. Egremont. I thought it was you. I wanted——'

They were under the church. As Thyrza spoke, the bells suddenly broke out with their harsh clanging: they had been ringing for the last twenty minutes, and were now recommencing after a pause.

Egremont glanced towards the tower, startled and seemingly annoyed.

'I'm very sorry I couldn't come to the library this morning, Miss Trent,' he said, very formally. 'I was unexpectedly kept away.'

What automaton had taken his place and spoke in this contemptible tone of conventional politeness?

'Those bells are so loud,' Thyrza said, complainingly. 'I wanted to—to ask you something. May I go with you a little further—just to the bridge?'

He said nothing, but looked at her and walked on. They entered the bridge. Egremont still advanced, and Thyrza kept by him, till they were nearly on the Westminster side of the river. Very few people passed them, and no vehicles disturbed the quiet of the dark road along the waterside. On the one hand was a black mass of wharfs, a few barges moored in front; on the other, at a little distance, the gloomy shape of Milbank prison. The jangle of the bells was softened.

'They certainly might be more musical,' Egremont said, with a forced laugh. 'I should not care to live in one of the houses just under the church.'

'No, indeed.'

However it had been before, he knew now beyond possibility of doubt all that was in Thyrza's heart. Why had he allowed her to come thus far with him? He must fix sternly his final purpose. It was monstrous cruelty to encourage, even involuntarily, the weakness to which she was yielding, and scarcely less cruelty to himself, if it were to end in nothing. Here, then, was the moment for decision. She might be

weak, it did not misbecome her; but he, at all events, must act manlike, if he would retain henceforth one spark of self-respect.

His love was great enough to justify anything. One word, and it was done. He had but to put out his hand, to say, 'Thyrza, come with me,' and she was his for ever.

She was speaking.

'I waited this morning. Oh, it didn't matter; but I was afraid—I thought you might have had some accident, Mr. Egremont.'

'No. It was business that prevented me from coming. But you wish to ask me something, Miss Trent?'

'If you will be there to-morrow—that was all. I like helping. I like looking at the books, and putting them up—if you would let me.'

The nearest lamp showed him her face. What held him from making that pale loveliness his own? Why did he not take her and clasp her about with his arms, and drink his fill of love from the sweet lips that so passioned for his? His heart throbbed as terribly as hers; he with difficulty heard when she spoke, so loud was the rush of blood in his ears.

But he had begun the fight with himself. He could not turn away abruptly and leave her standing there; if the victory were to be won, it must be by sheer wrestle with the temptation, for her sake as well as his own. To let her so much as suspect his feeling

were as bad as to utter it; nay, infinitely worse, for it would mean that he must not see her after to-night. He and she would then be each other's peril in a far direr sense than now.

He replied to her:

'I'm so sorry; I shall not be there to-morrow. I have to go out of London.'

He looked her in the face unwaveringly. It was the look which tormented her, not that which she yearned for. She could not move away her eyes.

'You are going away, Mr. Egremont?'

'Yes, I am going out of England for a week or two—perhaps for longer.'

It was wrong—all wrong. In spite of himself he could not but admit a note of pathos. The automatic voice of politeness would not come at his bidding. He should have left her on the other side of the bridge, where the harsh bells allowed no delicacies of tone.

'To France?' she asked.

'No. To an island very near France. I must not keep you standing here, Miss Trent. It is very cold.'

Yes, the wind was cold, but perspiration covered his face.

'Please—only a minute. May I go to the library and do some more of the books? Are they all finished?'

'No. There's still one case of them, and more will be coming. Certainly you may go there if you wish.'

Her voice fell.

'But I shan't know how to put them. No, I can't do it alone.'

'I shall write to Mr. Grail, and tell him what I have been doing. You can help him.'

'Yes.'

The monosyllable fell from her like a whisper of despair. But the utterance of Grail's name had brought Egremont the last impulse he needed.

'When I come back,' he said, 'I shall find you in your new home. As I shan't see you again, let me say now how much I hope that you will live there a long time and very happily. Good-bye, Miss Trent.'

Surely that was formal and automatic enough. Not one more word, not one more glance at her face. He had touched her hand, had raised his hat, was gone.

She stood gazing after him until, in a minute or two, he was lost in the dark street behind the wharfs. So suddenly! He had scarcely said good-bye—so poor a good-bye! She had vexed him with her importunities; he wished to show her that she had not behaved in the way that pleased him. Scarcely a good-bye!

She went to the end of the bridge, and there crept into a dark place whither no eye could follow her. Her strength was at an end. She fell to her knees; her head lay against something hard and cold; a sob convulsed her, and then in the very anguish of desolation she wept. The darkness folded her; she could lie here on the ground and abandon herself to misery. She wept her soul from her eyes.

But for Egremont the struggle was not over. He had scarcely passed out of her sight when fear held his steps. Thyrza must not be left there alone. That face of hers, looking like marble, threatened despair. How could he leave her so far from home, in the night, by the river?

He went back. He knew what such return meant. It was defeat after all. He knew what his first word to her would be.

He sought her now, sought her that she might never leave him again. The flood of passion was too strong; that moment of supreme restraint had but massed the waters into overwhelming power. It was the thought of danger to her that had ended all pity for Gilbert.

She was not in sight. Could she have passed the bridge so quickly? He ran forward. True, it must be more than five minutes since he had left her, much more, perhaps, for he could not judge how long he had stood battling with himself behind the wharfs.

A policeman stood at the end of the bridge. Egremont asked him if a young girl had just passed. Yes, such a one had gone by a minute or two ago.

He ran on, past the church, into High Street. But would she go this way? A girl crossed the road a little way ahead, into Paradise Street. He overtook her, only to be disappointed.

At the end of Newport Street a man stood, waiting. It was Gilbert Grail; he had come in the hope of

meeting Thyrza, who, Lydia had told him, was gone to see Totty Nancarrow. He was greatly anxious about her.

Egremont, coming up at a swift pace, recognised Gilbert and stopped. They shook hands. Grail was silent, Egremont began to stammer words. He had been to see Bunce, just now, for such and such reasons, with such and such results. But he could not stop, he had an engagement. Good-night!

The shame of it! He found himself in Lambeth Walk, no longer searching, anxious only to get away from the sight of men. Thyrza must be home by this time. That speech with Gilbert had chilled him, and now he was hot with self-contempt. He made his way out into Westminster Bridge Road, thence walked to his own part of the town.

CHAPTER IX.

CONFESSION.

This Wednesday morning Lydia went to her work reluctantly. Thyrza was so strange; it looked as if she was going to have an illness. Again there had been a night of sleeplessness; if the girl fell for a moment into slumber she broke from it with an inarticulate cry as if of fear. It was now nearly a week since Thyrza had really slept through the night, but it was growing worse. She was feverish; she muttered, so that Lydia was terrified lest she had become delirious. And there was no explaining it all. The excitement of the concert, surely, could not have such lasting results; indeed, Thyrza seemed no longer to give a thought to the music. All she begged for was that she might be allowed to remain alone. She did not wish Mrs. Grail to come up to the room. She said she would go out in the course of the morning and that would do her good.

So Lydia went forth reluctantly. At the entrance to the factory she met Totty Nancarrow. They just

gave each other a good-morning. Totty seemed dull. She did not run up the stairs as usual, but walked with a tired step.

Lydia, following her, broke her habit, and spoke.

'Thyrza isn't at all well.'

'Isn't she?' said the other, without turning her head, and in a tone of little interest.

Lydia bit her lip, vexed that she had said anything.

They came into the work-room. There were a number of tables, at which girls and women were beginning to seat themselves. A portion of the room was divided off by a glass partition, and within the little office thus formed sat the forewoman, surrounded with felt hats, some finished, some waiting for the needle to line them and put the band on. Sitting here, she overlooked the workers, some fifty when all were assembled.

There was much buzzing and tittering and laughing aloud. All belonged to the class of needlewomen who preserve appearances; many of them were becomingly dressed, and none betrayed extreme poverty. Probably a fourth came from homes in which they were not the only wage-earners, and would not starve if work slackened now and then, having fathers or brothers to help them. Whether they liked coming to work or not, all showed much cheerfulness at the commencement of the day. They greeted each other pleasantly, sometimes affectionately, and not one who lacked a story of personal incident to be quickly related to a

friend whilst the work was being given out. So much seemed to happen in the hours of freedom.

Lydia was much quieter than usual. It was not her wont to gossip of her own affairs, or to pry into the secrets of her acquaintances; but with the little group of those with whom she was intimate she had generally some piece of merriment to share, always marked by kindness of feeling. She was a favourite with the most sensible girls of her own age. Thyrza had never been exactly a favourite, though some older than herself always used to pet her, generally causing her annoyance.

About a quarter of an hour had passed, and work was getting into trim, when a girl, a late arrival, in coming to her place, handed Lydia a letter.

'Someone downstairs asked me to give it you,' she whispered. 'You needn't blush, you know.'

Lydia was too surprised to manifest any such self-consciousness. She murmured thanks, and looked at the address. It was a man's writing, but she had no idea whose. She opened the envelope and found Ackroyd's short note.

What did this mean? It at once flashed across Lydia's mind that there might be some connection between this and Thyrza's strange disorder. Old habit still brought Ackroyd and Thyrza together in her thoughts. Yet how was it possible? Ackroyd was engaged to Totty Nancarrow, and Thyrza had never shown the least interest when she mentioned him of

late. Was he going to make trouble, now at the last moment, when everything seemed to have taken the final form?

Lydia had communed with herself for many a busy hour on the character of Luke Ackroyd. His course during the past six months had obliged her to think of him in a new light. She saw now how greatly her former judgment had been coloured by the personal liking which, happily, has so little to do with moral estimate. From her first meeting with Ackroyd she had liked him, and when she found that his thoughts were bent on Thyrza, she determined to aid him all she could, since he was worthy. Self-sacrifice had been happiness to her as long as she could hope that the desired end would be won. Day by day she strengthened her admiration of him, encouraging herself to do so. It was a subtle temptation that led her on. She must not love him for herself, but was it not right that she should see all nobleness in the man who was to wed her sister? When she let her mind brood upon him the excuse was that she desired to know him well, that she might speak of him to Thyrza. Unhappily, the distinction was too fine to allow of any difference in results; she might deny that she loved Ackroyd, but none the less the day came when she found that for her own peace she durst no longer think of him so much.

Since Thyrza's engagement to Gilbert, there was no longer need of subtle self-deceptions, but, though

she might now freely think of him, Lydia soon found that Ackroyd was not the same in her eyes. The first rumours of his abandonment to vulgar dissipation she utterly refused to credit, but before long she had to believe them in spite of herself. She saw him one night coming out of a public-house, singing a drunken song. It was a terrible blow to her; she had to question herself much, and to make great efforts to understand a man's nature. She had thought him incapable of such things. The vague stories of earlier wildness she had held no account of. When a woman says 'Oh, that is past,' she means 'It does not exist, and never did exist.'

It surprised her that she still thought of him with heart-ache. Her quarrel with Mary Bower seemed an encouragement to the love she kept so secret. She found a thousand excuses for him; she pitied him deeply; she longed to go and speak to him. Why could she not do so? Often and often she rehearsed conversations with him, in which she told him how unworthy it was to fall so, and implored him for his own sake to be a man again. She might have realised such a dialogue—though it would have cost her much—but for the news that he had begun to pay attention to Totty Nancarrow.

Then she knew jealousy. Of Thyrza she could not be jealous, but to imagine him giving his affection to a girl like Totty Nancarrow made her rebellious and scornful. How little could any of her work-room com-

panions know what was passing in Lydia's breast when she had one of her days of quietness and bent with such persistence over her sewing. If spoken to, she raised the same kind, helpful face as ever; you could not imagine that a minute ago a tear had all but come to her eyes, that in thought she had been uttering words of indignant passion. They were rare, those days in which she could not be quite herself. It was not her nature to yield when weakness tempted.

And now he had written to her. Having read the note, she put it into the bosom of her dress, and whilst her fingers were busy, she turned over every possible explanation in her mind. She knew that he had abandoned his evil habits of late, and she could be just enough not to refuse Totty some credit for the change. Gilbert himself had said that the girl's influence seemed on the whole good. But some mystery was now going to reveal itself. It concerned Thyrza; she was sure it did. The fact that the note was delivered in this way, and the request for secrecy which it contained, made this certain.

At dinner-time, and again in the evening, Thyrza was still in the same state of depression and feverishness. Lydia said nothing of the business which would take her out at eight o'clock. When the time came, and she had to make an excuse, Thyrza said that she too would go out; she wanted to see Totty.

'You'll tell Gilbert?' Lydia replied, afraid to make any opposition herself.

'No. He'd say it wasn't good for me to go out, and I want to go. You won't say anything, Lyddy?'

'I ought to, dear. You're not well enough to go, that's quite certain.'

'I won't be long. I must go just for half an hour.'

'Why do you want to see her?' Lydia asked, masking her curiosity with a half-absent tone.

'Oh, nothing to explain. I feel I want to talk, that's all.'

From time to time—in her more difficult moments—Lydia had felt a little hurt that the course of circumstances made no difference in Thyrza's friendship for Totty. When her truer mind was restored, she knew that the reproach was a foolish one. More likely it was she herself who was to blame for having always nourished a prejudice against Totty. At present, Thyrza's anxiety to go out was another detail connecting itself with Ackroyd's summons. Something unexplained was in progress between those three, Totty and Ackroyd and Thyrza. Her resentment against the first of them revived.

She would soon know what it all meant. Thyrza and she left the house together and went in opposite directions. Lydia crossed Kennington Road, and found Luke waiting for her. She approached him with veiled eyes.

'I'm so glad you've come,' he began, with signs of disturbance. 'It's kind of you to come. I have a great

deal to say, and I can't speak here. Will you come round into Walcot Square?—it'll be quieter.'

She said nothing, but walked beside him. It was a new and strange sensation to be thus accompanying Ackroyd.

She was conscious that her pulses quickened. They went on in silence till they reached the spot which Luke had mentioned, an irregular little square, without traffic, dark.

'I don't know how to begin to tell you, Miss Trent,' Ackroyd said, when he stopped and turned towards her. 'It's your sister I have to speak about.'

She had foreseen truly. Her heart sank.

'What can you have to say about my sister, Mr. Ackroyd?' she asked in a hard voice.

'I'm not surprised that you speak in that way. I know that I shall seem a busybody, or perhaps something worse, meddling with things that don't concern me. It would be easier for me to leave it alone, but I couldn't do that, because I can't think of you and your sister as strangers. I've heard something said about Thyrza that you ought to know. Be friendly to me, and believe I'm only telling you this because I think it's my duty.'

Lydia was looking at him in astonishment.

'You've heard something? What? What has anybody to say about my sister?'

'I shall make no secret of anything—it's the only way to prove I'm behaving honestly to you. I was at

the club last night, and Bower came and sat down by me, and he began to talk about Thyrza. He said it looked strange that she should be alone with Mr. Egremont in the library every morning. The woman that takes care of the place told him about it, and he's seen Thyrza himself coming away at dinner-time, when Mr. Egremont was there. He says she goes to help him to put books on the shelves. He spoke of it in a way that showed he was telling the story to all sorts of people, and in a way that means harm. I'd sooner bite my tongue out than repeat such things about your sister, if it wasn't that you ought to know. I might have told Grail, but I felt it was better to see you first. I know I'm making trouble enough any way, but I believe you will give me credit for acting honestly. Don't think of me as the kind of man I've seemed since Christmas. You used to think well of me, and you must do so now, Miss Trent. I'm speaking as a true friend.'

He hurried out his words of self-justification, for he saw the anger in her face.

'And you believe this?' Lydia exclaimed, when she could use her voice. 'You believe a man that will go saying things like this about my sister? Why is he trying to do us harm? Why, there *are* no books to put on the shelves! No books have come to the library yet!'

She laughed scornfully, and, before he could speak, continued with the same vehemence.

'What have we done to Mr. Bower? I suppose it's because we're not so friendly with them as we were. So he does his best to take away our good name, and to ruin Thyrza's life! Of course, I knew very well what you mean. I know what *he* means. He's a cruel coward! It's a lie that he's seen Thyrza coming out of the library! Why, I tell you there *are* no books there! How could she help to put them on the shelves? You shall come with me this minute to the Bowers' house! You can't refuse to do that, Mr. Ackroyd: it's only fair, it's only justice. You shall come and repeat to them all you've told me, and then see if he'll *dare* to say it again. I'm glad you didn't tell Gilbert; you were right, it was kindly done of you, to tell me first. I'm not angry with you; you mustn't think that: though you speak as if you believed his lies. I should have thought you knew Thyrza better. Come with me, this minute! You *shall* come, if you're an honest man, as you say you are!'

She laid her hand upon his arm. Ackroyd took the hand and held it whilst he compelled her to listen to him.

'Lydia, we can't go till you've heard everything. I've got more to tell you.'

'More? What is it? A man that'll say so much 'll say anything. You've told me quite enough, I should think, considering it's about my own sister.'

'But, Lydia, do listen to me, my poor girl! Try and quiet yourself, and listen to me. There's nothing

more of Bower's telling; he didn't say any more; and there was more harm in his way of telling it than in the story itself. But I have something to tell you that I've found out myself.'

She looked him in the face. Her hand she had drawn away.

'And *you* are going to say harm of Thyrza!' she said under her breath, eyeing him as though he were her deadliest enemy.

'Think and say of me what you like, Lydia. I've got something that I must tell you; if I don't, I'd a deal better never have said anything at all. You're not right about the library. There *are* books there, and Mr. Egremont has been busy with them of a morning.'

'But how can *you* know better than Gilbert?' she cried.

'I know, because I went last night to find out. As soon as I'd heard Bower's tale, I went. And I was there again to-day, at dinner-time, and I saw your sister come out of the door.'

She was silent. In spite of her passionate exclamations, a suspicion had whispered within her from the first, a voice to which she would lend no ear. Now she was constrained to think. She remembered Thyrza's lateness at dinner on Monday; she remembered that Thyrza had been from home each morning this week. And if it were true that books had arrived at the library, and that Gilbert knew nothing of it—— Was

this the explanation of Thyrza's illness, of her inexplicable agitations, of her sleeplessness?

She could not raise her head. Ackroyd too kept silent. She asked at length: 'Have you anything more to tell me?'

'Yes, I *have* something more. It's another thing that I found out last night, after leaving Bower. Say that you don't accuse me of conduct as bad as Bower's!' he added, vehemently. 'I *must* tell you everything, and it makes me seem as if I told it for the sake of telling. Say you believe in my honesty, at all events!'

'I don't accuse you of anything,' she replied, still under her breath. 'What is it you have to say?'

'I went to see Miss Nancarrow. I had no thought of repeating the story to her—you must believe me or not, as you like, but I am telling you the truth. I wanted to see if she had heard anything from the Bowers, and I wanted to try and find out, if I could, whether Thyrza had told her any secret. It wasn't out of a wish to pry into things I'd no concern with, but because I felt afraid for Thyrza, and because I wanted to be sure that there was sufficient reason for it before I came to you to put you on your guard. I said to Totty: "Have you any reason to think that Thyrza cares for somebody else more than for Grail?" She got angry at once, and said she knew all about it, that she'd no patience with Thyrza, and that she wasn't going to have anything more to do with the affair. I've

told you plainly, Lydia, told you everything. I hope I've done it for the best.'

She stood as if she heard nothing. Her arms hung down; her eyes were fixed on the ground. She was thinking that now she understood Thyrza's urgency in wishing to see Totty. Now she understood everything.

She moved, as if to go away. Ackroyd could find no word. All he had to say was so much sheer cruelty, and to attempt comfort would be insult. But Lydia faced him again.

'And you think the worst of my sister?'

Again her look was defiant. She had no enemy in the world like the man who could accuse Thyrza of guilt. It was one thing to point out that Thyrza was in danger of being calumniated, another to believe that the evil judgment was merited.

'I *don't* think the worst of her, Lydia,' he replied, firmly. 'I think it likely that she has been doing something very thoughtless, and I am quite sure that that man Egremont has been doing something for which he deserves to be thrashed. But no more than that. More than that I *won't* believe!'

'Thank you, Mr. Ackroyd! A minute ago I hated you, now I know that I have always been right in thinking you had a good heart. Thyrza may have been foolish in keeping things from me, but she's no more to blame than that. You can believe me. I would say it, if it was my life or death!'

He took her hand and pressed it.

'And you think Mr. Bower is telling everyone?' she asked, her voice wonderfully changed, for all at once she became a woman, and felt her need of a strong man's aid.

'I'm afraid so When he'd done his tale to me last night, I told him that if he hadn't been a man so much older than myself I'd have struck him in face of all in the club. I'd perhaps better not have angered him, but it wouldn't make much difference. He's got ill feeling against Egremont, I believe.'

Lydia's eyes flashed when she heard of that speech to Bower.

'And you think he's doing this more to harm Mr. Egremont than Thyrza?'

'I do. He's a gossiping fool, but I don't believe he'd plot to ruin a girl in this way. Still, I'm quite sure the story 'll have got about, and it comes to the same thing.'

Both stood in thought. Lydia felt as if all the bright future were blasted before her eyes. Thyrza loved Egremont. Egremont was the falsest of friends to Gilbert, the most treacherous of men. Her darling had been artfully drawn by him into this secret intercourse; and how was it all to end?

'I must go home to Thyrza, Mr. Ackroyd. I don't know what to do, but it will come to me when I see my sister.'

She reflected a moment, then added:

'She went to see Totty Nancarrow, at the same time when I came out. Perhaps she'll be there still. If I don't find her at home, I must go to the other house. Good-bye!'

'I do wish I could be some help to you, Lydia!' he said, holding her hand and looking very kindly at her.

'You can't. Nobody can help. Whatever happens Thyrza and me will be together, and I shall keep her from harm. But you've been a good friend to me to-night, Mr. Ackroyd. I can't do more than say I'm grateful to you. I shall be that, as long as I live.'

'Lydia—— I don't want to pry into anything between you and your sister, but if I *can* do anything to be of use to her—or to you—you'll tell me? You could easily send a message to me.'

'Thank you. I *will* ask you if there is anything. Let me go home alone, Mr. Ackroyd.'

She came to the house, and saw that there was no light in the window of their room. Still, Thyrza might be sitting there. She ran upstairs. The room was vacant.

Then she hurried to Newport Street. Mrs. Ladds told her that Totty had not come in yet, and that Thyrza had been and was gone away again. She turned on her steps slowly, and after a short uncertainty went home again, in the hope that Thyrza might have returned. As she entered, Gilbert met her in the passage.

'Is Thyrza come back?' she asked.

'No, she isn't in the house. Where did she go to?'

'She went just to see Totty Nancarrow.' Nothing was to be gained by concealing this now. 'I've been there, but she's gone away. I dare say she'll be back in a few minutes.'

Lydia went upstairs, not feeling able to talk. Gilbert, who since Monday had fallen into ever deeper trouble, left the house and walked towards Newport Street, hoping to find Thyrza. It was thus that he came to be met by Egremont. He was back in half an hour. Lydia came down when she heard him enter.

'Lydia,' he said, gravely, 'you shouldn't have allowed her to go out. She isn't in a fit state to leave the house.'

'It was wrong, I know,' she said, standing just inside the door of the parlour.

Gilbert mentioned that he had seen Egremont. Before she could check herself, Lydia exclaimed:

'Where?'

He looked at her in surprise. She turned very pale. Mrs. Grail was also gazing at her.

'It was at the end of Newport Street,' Gilbert replied. 'Why are you so anxious to know where?'

'I'm sure I don't know. I'm worrying so about that child. I spoke without thinking at all.'

Half an hour more passed, then, as all sat silently together, they heard the front door opening. Lydia started up.

'Don't move, Gilbert! Let me go up with her. She'll be afraid of being scolded.'

She went out into the passage. The little lamp hung against the wall as usual, and when by its light she saw Thyrza, she was made motionless by alarm. Not only was the girl's face scarcely recognisable; her clothing was stained and in disorder.

'Thyrza!' she whispered. 'My darling, what has happened?'

The other, with a terrified look at the Grails' door, ran past and up the stairs, speaking no word. Her sister followed.

In the room, Thyrza did not sit down, though her whole body trembled. She took off her hat, and tried to undo her jacket.

'What is it?' Lydia asked, coming near to her. 'Where have you been? What's made you like this?'

She was almost as pale as her sister, and fear pressed on her throat. Knowing what she did, she imagined some dreadful catastrophe. Thyrza seemed unable to speak, and her eyes were so wild, so pain-stricken, that they looked like madness. She tried to smile, and at length said disconnectedly:

'It's nothing, Lyddy—only frightened—somebody—a drunken man—frightened me, and I fell down. Nothing else!'

Lydia could make no reply. She did not believe the story. Silently she helped to remove the jacket,

and led Thyrza to a chair. Then she drew the dear head to her and held it close against her breast.

'You are so cold, Thyrza! Where have you been? Tell me, tell Lyddy!'

'Totty wasn't at home. I walked a little way. Gilbert doesn't know? You haven't told him?'

'No, no, dear, it's all right. Come nearer to the fire: oh, how cold you are! Sit on my lap, dearest; rest your head against me. Why have you been crying, Thyrza?'

There was no answer. Held thus in her sister's arms, Thyrza abandoned herself, closed her eyes, let every limb hang as it would, tried to be as though she were dead. Lydia thought at first that she had lost consciousness, but her cry brought an answer. They sat thus for some minutes.

Then Thyrza whispered:

'I'm poorly, Lyddy. Let me go to bed.'

'You shall, dear. I'll sit by you. You'll let me stay by you?'

'Yes.'

As her clothes were removed, she shook feverishly.

'They won't come up?' she asked several times. 'Mrs. Grail won't come? Go and tell them I've got a headache, and that it'll be all right in the morning.'

'They won't come, dear. Get into bed, and I'll go and tell them directly.'

She could have wept for misery, but she must be strong for Thyrza's sake. Whatever hope remained

depended now upon her own self-command and prudence. When Thyrza had lain down, Lydia succeeded in showing almost a cheerful face.

'I'll just go down and say you're poorly. You won't move till I come back?'

Thyrza shook her head.

Her sister was only away for a minute or two. She re-entered the room panting with the speed she had made. And she sat down at the bedside.

There was no word for a long time. Thyrza's eyes were closed; her lips quivered every now and then with a faint sob. The golden braid, which Lydia had not troubled to undo, lay under her cheek.

Lydia held counsel with herself. Something had happened, something worse, she thought, than a mere fit of wretchedness in the suffering heart. There was no explaining the disordered state in which the girl had come back.

Gilbert said that he had met Mr. Egremont at the end of Newport Street. Was it conceivable that Thyrza had had an appointment with Egremont at Totty's house? No; that was not to be credited, for many reasons. Totty—by Luke's account—was angry with Thyrza, and refused to hear anything of what was going on. Yet it was very strange that he should be going to see Mr. Bunce just at the same time that Thyrza was there, and in Totty's absence, too.

What to think of Mr. Egremont? There was the central question. She knew him scarcely at all; had

only seen him on that one occasion when she opened the house-door to him. There was Gilbert's constant praise of him, but Lydia knew enough of the world to understand that Gilbert might very easily err in his judgment of a young man in Egremont's position. Ackroyd seemed to have no doubt at all; he had said at once that Egremont deserved to be thrashed. Clearly he believed the worst of Egremont, attributed to him a deliberate plot. If he was right, then what might not have befallen?

She had said to herself that she would not dishonour her sister by fearing more than a pardonable weakness. Now there was a black dread closing in upon her.

How to act with Thyrza? Must she reveal all that Ackroyd told her, and so compel a confession?

Not that, if it could possibly be avoided. It would drive Thyrza to despair. No; it must be kept from her that prying eyes had watched her going and coming. Already it might be too late; the marriage with Gilbert might be impossible, if only because Thyrza would inevitably betray her love for Egremont; but there was all the future to think of, and Thyrza must not be driven to some irreparable folly.

There was one hypothesis which Lydia quite left aside. She did not ask herself whether Egremont might not truly and honestly love her sister. It was natural enough that she should not think of it. Every tradition weighed in favour of rascality on the young

man's part, and Lydia's education did not suffice to raise her above the common point of view in such a matter. A gentleman did not fall in love with a work-girl, not in the honest sense. Lydia had the preju dices of her class, and her judgment went full against Egremont from the outset. He had encouraged secret meetings, the kind of thing to be expected. He must have known perfectly what a blow he was preparing for Gilbert, if the fact of these meetings should be discovered. What did he care for that? His selfishness was proof against every scruple, no doubt.

She could not argue as an educated person might have done. Egremont's zeal in his various undertakings made no plea for his character, in her mind. To be sure, a more subtle reasoner might have given it as little weight, but that would have been the result of conscious wisdom. Lydia could only argue from her predisposition regarding the class of 'gentlemen.' We know how she had shrunk from meeting Egremont. Guided by Gilbert and Thyrza, she had taught herself to think well of him, but, given the least grounds of suspicion, class-instinct was urgent to condemn.

Only one way recommended itself to her, and that the way of love. She must lead Thyrza to confide in her, must get at the secret by constraint of tenderness. She might seem to suspect, but the grounds of her suspicion must be hidden.

Having resolved this, she leaned nearer and spoke gentle words such as might soothe. Thyrza made no

response, save that she raised her lids and looked wofully.

'Dear one, what is it you're keeping from me?' Lydia pleaded. 'Is it kind, Thyrza, is it kind to me? It isn't enough to tell me you're poorly; there's more than that. Do you think I can look at you and not see that you have a secret from me?'

Thyrza had closed her eyes again, and was mute.

'Dear, how can you be afraid of *me*, your old Lyddy? When there's anything you're glad of, you tell me; oughtn't I to know far more when you're in trouble? Speak to me, dear sister! I'll put my head near yours; whisper it to me! How *can* I go on in this way? Every day I see you getting worse. I'm miserable when I'm away at work; I haven't a minute's peace. Be kind to me, and say what has happened.'

There was silence.

'Do you think there's anything in me but love for you, my dearest, my Thyrza? Do you think I could say a cruel word, tell me what ever you might? Do you think I shan't love you only the better, the more unhappy you are? Perhaps I half know what it is, perhaps——'

Thyrza started and gazed with the same wildness as when she first came in.

'You know? What do you know? Tell me at once, Lyddy!'

'I don't really know anything, love—it's only that I can't help thinking—I've noticed things.'

Thyrza raised herself upon one arm. She was terror-stricken.

'What have you noticed? Tell me at once! You've no right to say things of that kind! Can't I be poorly without you talking as if I'd done something wrong? What have I done? Nothing, nothing! Leave me alone, Lyddy? Go downstairs, and leave me to myself!'

'But you don't understand me,' pleaded the other. 'I don't think you've done anything, but I know you're in trouble—how can I help knowing it?'

'But you said you've noticed things. What do you mean by that? You'd no right to say it if you don't mean anything! You're trying to frighten me! I can't bear you sitting there! I want to be alone! If you must stay in the room, go away and sit by the fire. Haven't you no sewing to do? You've always got plenty at other times. Oh, you make me feel as if I should go mad!'

Lydia withdrew from the bedside. She sat down in a corner of the room and covered her face with her hands.

Thyrza fell back exhausted. She had wrought herself almost to hysteria, and, though she could not shed tears, the dry sobs seemed as if they would rend her bosom.

Minutes passed. She turned and looked at her sister. Lydia was bent forward, propping her forehead.

'Lyddy, I want you.'

Lydia came forward. She had been crying. She fell on her knees by the bed.

'Lyddy, what did you mean? It's no good denying it, you meant something. You said you'd noticed things. You've no right to say that and say no more.'

'You won't tell me what your secret is without me saying what I've thought?'

'I've got no secret! I don't know what you mean by secret!'

'Thyrza—have you—have you seen Mr. Egremont to-night?'

They looked at each other. Thyrza's lips were just parted; she drew herself back, as if to escape scrutiny. The arm with which she supported herself trembled violently.

'Why do you ask that?' she said, faintly.

'That's what I meant, Thyrza,' the other whispered, with a face of fear.

'Have I seen Mr. Egremont? I don't know what you're thinking of? Why should I see Mr. Egremont? What have I to do with him?'

Lydia put her hand forward and touched her sister.

'Thyrza!' she cried, passionately. 'Tell me! Tell me everything! I can't bear it! If you have ever so little love for me in your heart—tell me!'

Thyrza could no longer keep her raised position. She fell back. Then with one hand she caught the railing at the head of the bed and held it convulsively, whilst she buried her face in the pillow.

Lydia bent over her, and said in low, quick tones:

'I think no harm of you! Perhaps you've got to like him too much, and he's persuaded you to go to meet him. It's only what I've thought to myself. Tell me, and let me be a sister to you; let me help you! No one else shall hear a word of it, Thyrza. Only Lyddy! We'll talk about it, and see what can be done. You shall tell me how it began—tell me all there is in your heart, poor child. It'll comfort you to speak of it. The secret is killing you, my darling. There's no harm—none—none! You couldn't help it. Only let us both know, and talk to each other about it, like sisters!'

Thyrza's grasp of the iron loosened, and her hand fell. She turned her face to the light again.

'Lyddy, how do you know this?'

'I thought it. You've been out every morning. You spoke of him in a way——'

'Has anyone said anything to you? Has Gilbert?'

'No, no! Gilbert hasn't such a thought. It's all myself. Oh, what has he been saying to you, Thyrza?'

A change was coming about in the sufferer. What had at the first suggestion been a terror now grew upon her as an assuagement of pain. She clung to her sister's hand.

'I don't know how it began,' she whispered. 'It seems so sudden; but I think it's been coming for a long time. Ever since I saw him that day at the library—the first time I ever saw him. Ever since,

there hasn't been a day I haven't thought of him. I never saw anyone else that made me think like that. Day and night, Lyddy! But it didn't trouble me at first. It was only after I came back from Eastbourne. I seemed to think of everything in a different way after that. I dreamt of him every night, and I did so want to see him. I don't know why. Then I saw him at last—on Monday—at the library.'

'You hadn't met him—alone—before then?'

'No, never since that first time.'

'But why did you go there on Monday?'

'Oh, I can't—can't think! Something seemed to tell me to go there. I found there was some books come, and he was putting them on the shelves. He said he didn't want Gilbert to know—just for fun—and I promised not to say anything.'

'You mean last Monday? This week?'

'Yes. Not before then. And it seems—oh, it seems a month ago, Lyddy!'

She lay back, pressing Lydia's hand against her heart.

'But did he ask you to go again, dear?'

'No, he didn't. It was all myself. Lyddy, I couldn't keep away. I couldn't! Will you believe I'm telling the truth? I tried—I did try so hard! I knew I oughtn't to go, because I wanted to so much. I knew it was wrong. I don't think I should have gone if Mrs. Grail hadn't forced me to go out for a walk, because she said it would take my headache away.

I was holding myself back all the morning. And when I got out—I couldn't help it—I was drawn there! And then I asked him if I might come again to-day. He said I might, but I could see he thought it was wrong of me. And, Lyddy, he never came. I stayed there waiting. Oh, do you know what I suffered? I can't tell you!'

'My dearest, I know, I feel with you! But it will be better now you've told me. And to-night? Didn't you see him to-night?'

'How do you know? Who told you?' she asked, nervously.

'No one, dear. I only think it. The way you came in——'

Thyrza suddenly bent forward, listening.

'Can anyone hear us?' she whispered. 'Go and see if anyone's outside.'

'There's no one, dear.'

'Go and look. I'm afraid.'

Lydia went and opened the door. She closed it again, and came back shaking her head.

'I didn't think I should see him,' Thyrza continued. 'I was waiting in Totty's room, and he came to see Mr. Bunce. I heard his voice. When he went away, I followed him. I couldn't help myself. I would have given my life for a word from him. I wanted to know why he hadn't come this morning. I followed him, and walked with him over the bridge. Then he told me he was going away, somewhere out of England,

and I shouldn't see him again till after—after I was married.'

She choked. Lydia soothed her again, and she continued, with growing agitation :

'Then he said good-bye—he went away very quickly, after just saying he hoped I should be happy. Happy! How can I be happy? And when he was gone, I went somewhere and fell down and cried—somewhere where nobody could see me. He's gone, Lyddy! How am I to live without him?'

She sobbed and struggled for her voice. Then, with a burst of passion :

'I love him! Oh, I do love him! Lyddy, I never knew what love was before. Gilbert once asked me if I loved him, and I said yes. I didn't know what I was saying! I've never loved Gilbert, never, and I never can love him. I've given away all the love I have. It'll kill me, Lyddy!'

They held each other. Thyrza sobbed out her anguish until strength failed, then lay in her sister's arms, pale as a corpse.

When there had been utter silence for a while, Lydia asked :

'And he has never said anything to you that—that he oughtn't to have said?'

'Said? What did you think? You thought he—he loved *me*?'

'I didn't know, dearest.'

'Oh, if he did! He asked me not to call him

"sir," and to be his friend—never more than that. You thought he loved me? How could he love a girl like me, Lyddy?'

Lydia had followed the unfolding of the tale with growing surprise. It was impossible to doubt Thyrza's truthfulness. Yet there must be more on Egremont's part than appeared. Why did he exact secrecy about those meetings in the library? There was little doubt that Thyrza had betrayed herself to him. True, he had refrained from keeping the appointment for this morning, and it seemed he was going away till after the marriage. But all this was too late.

Still he was innocent of the guilt she had suspected. Thyrza had not come to the dreaded harm. Though heart-broken, she was saved. Lydia felt almost joyous for an instant. Bower's gossip might yet be deprived of its sting, for Mr. Egremont would be gone, and—Monday was so near.

It was the reaction from her terror. She could think of nothing for the moment but that Thyrza must be preserved from future risk by marriage.

Thyrza was lying exhausted. Lydia, deep in thought, was surprised to see a faint smile on the beautiful pale face.

'You thought he loved me?' was whispered. 'Oh, if he did! If he did!'

Lydia was still kneeling. New fears were making themselves heard. Was it possible for Thyrza to marry Gilbert under such circumstances, and within

five days? What if Gilbert heard Bower's story? Nay, in any case, what of the future? Egremont would be constantly at the library.

Her heart sank again. Thyrza had begun to speak.

'I'm so glad I told you, Lyddy—my own Lyddy! You were right. It's better to have told you everything. Lyddy, do you know how I love him? I would die to have one kind word from him. Oh, how I have thought and dreamt of him! One night, Lyddy, I dreamt he came here, to the house, and I was alone—quite alone. And he came into the sitting-room, and then he took my hand, and I thought he was just going to say something;—but then I woke. And I lay and cried—it was cruel to wake then! How—how can I live?'

'Thyrza, do you never think of Gilbert?'

Thyrza raised herself, again the look of wild dread in her eyes.

'Lyddy, I can't marry him! You know now that I can't, don't you? It would be wrong. I shall love *him* as long as ever I live—love him and think of him every minute. I can't marry Gilbert.'

There was silence. Lydia looked up with tearful, appealing eyes.

'My dearest, think—think what that means! How can you break your word to him—now, when the day's almost here? Think what it'll mean to him. You'll have to tell him the reason, and then——'

'I'll tell him everything. I'll bear it. Can I help it, Lyddy? Am I happy?'

'But you haven't thought, Thyrza. It means that Gilbert will have to go on with his work at the factory.'

'Why? His mother will go and live with him at the library.'

Her voice sank. She began to understand.

'Do you suppose he can take that place from Mr. Egremont after he knows this, Thyrza?'

Thyrza was mute for a little. Then she said, under her breath:

'He needn't know the reason. He must think it's something else.'

'That's impossible. What a cruel thing it'll be to him! You know how he's looked forward. And then he loves you; he loves you more than you think. It will be dreadful! Thyrza, I don't think you'll make poor Gilbert suffer in that way. You couldn't do that, dear! You know what love means; have some pity for him!'

'I can't! He shan't know the reason; he shall go to the library just the same. We'll say it's only put off. I can't marry him on Monday! I'd sooner kill myself!'

There was a ring of terrible earnestness in the words. Lydia was afraid to plead any more at present. She affected to admit that there was no help. Yes, the marriage should be postponed; perhaps that would be a way.

The hour was late. After her sister's acquiescence Thyrza had fallen into brooding. She moved constantly. There was fire in her cheeks.

Only a few words were exchanged whilst Lydia undressed and lay down by her sister. Sleep was impossible to either of them. Yet Thyrza had not closed her eyes the night before. She was very feverish, could not lie in one position for more than a few minutes. When neither had spoken for nearly an hour, she said of a sudden:

'Lyddy, I want you to promise me that you'll never tell Gilbert nor Mrs. Grail one word of this. I want you to promise.'

'I promise you, dear. How could I think of doing so without your leave?'

There was a pause, then Thyrza resumed:

'I think you'll do as you say. Kiss me, and promise again.'

'I will keep your secret, dearest. I promise you.'

The other sighed deeply, and after that lay still.

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF THE DREAM.

GILBERT did not go to work next morning. Though Lydia had disguised her sister's strange condition as well as she could, he knew that something was being kept from him, and his mind, ever ready to doubt the reality of the happiness that had been granted him, was at length so beset with fears that he could no longer pay attention to the day's business. He rose at the usual time, but with a word at his mother's door made known his intention not to go out till after breakfast. Having lit a fire in the parlour, he sat down and tried to read.

He had purposed working till Saturday. To-night and to-morrow night (Thursday and Friday) Thyrza and he were to go and purchase such articles of furniture and the like as would be needed for the new house (the list was long since carefully made out, and the places of purchase decided upon), and these would be taken in by Mrs. Butterfield. On Saturday afternoon the contents of Gilbert's own room were to be removed; on that and the following night he would

sleep under the new roof, and by Monday morning would have things in sufficient order to allow of Mrs. Grail and Lydia coming, for these two were to keep each other company whilst he and his wife were away. By this scheme he might work on to the end of the week, and suffer no loss of wages.

But Gilbert was not a machine, unhappily for himself. Even had nothing external occurred to trouble the order he had planned, his own mood would probably have rendered steady work impossible now that he could positively count on his fingers the days before his marriage day—before the day which would make him a free man. It was hard to believe that two such blessings could descend upon a mortal at once. It seemed to him that the very hours, as they went by, looked on him with faces of mysterious menace, foretelling a dread successor. Since Monday he had with difficulty accomplished his tasks; each time he hastened home it was with unreasoning fear lest something had come to pass in his absence. And now it was no longer only apprehension. Thyrza was changing under his eyes. She was physically ill, and he knew that some agitation possessed her mind. She shrank from him.

The early morning at the straitened window of the parlour was cold and threatening. A faint ray of sunlight showed itself, only to fade upon a low, rain-charged sky. The sounds of labour recommencing were as wearisome to him as they always are to one

who has watched through an unending night. The house itself seemed unnaturally silent.

Mrs. Grail came in at length, and looked at him anxiously. Her own eyes lacked the refreshment of sleep.

'I didn't feel able to go, mother,' he said. 'I want to hear how Thyrza is as soon as possible. Perhaps you can go up presently?'

She murmured an assent, and began to lay the table.

In a few minutes she ascended very quietly and listened at the girls' door. Her report was that she could hear no sound; they must both be sleeping.

An hour went by. Mother and son made no pretence of conversing. Gilbert kept an open book before him. Rain had begun to fall, and the sky darkened as the minutes ticked themselves away by the clock on the mantelpiece.

Then there was a sound on the stairs. Lydia came into the room, and with her Thyrza.

Lydia smiled, and tried to draw attention from her sister by lamenting their lateness at the meal.

'We were afraid you'd have gone away again,' she said to Gilbert.

'I don't think I shall go to work this morning,' he replied quietly.

She became silent. Thyrza had drawn a chair to the table. One saw that she had risen with difficulty —that she with difficulty sat upright.

Gilbert, without speaking, went and sat by her. Lydia was dreading questions, but she did injustice to the delicacy of his mind. Mrs. Grail just said: 'You're very pale still, dear,' and nothing more.

The meal was made as short as possible. Then Lydia helped Mrs. Grail to take the things to the kitchen. Thyrza, before coming down, had asked to be left alone with Gilbert for a few minutes.

Grail was at the window, watching the rain. He heard Thyrza approaching him, and turned.

'Gilbert,' she said, without raising her eyes, 'I'm behaving very unkindly to you. Will you forgive me?'

'How are you behaving unkindly, Thyrza?' he asked, with gently expressed surprise.

'I've been keeping away from you. I couldn't help it. I don't feel myself.'

'You are ill, Thyrza. Am I to forgive you for that?'

'Yes, I am ill. Gilbert, is it too late to ask you? Will you put it off for a week, one week?'

He let a minute pass before replying. Seeing that she trembled as she stood, he led her to a chair, the chair in which she always sat.

'Dear,' he said at length, 'I will do whatever you wish.'

'I shall be better by then, I think. But I'll go with you to buy the things just the same.'

'We can leave that for a few days,' he said, absently.

'It wouldn't make any difference to you, at the library?'

'None, I am sure. I will write and tell Mr. Egremont. He will be very sorry to hear of your illness.'

She stood up, and looked at the clock.

'I've made you late for your work.'

'I shan't go to-day.'

'You won't go?' she asked.

'I can't, Thyrza. I'm too uneasy about you.'

'Don't be that, Gilbert. I promise you to try and get better.'

Another silence, then he asked:

'Will you stay here this morning?'

She just raised her face; fear and entreaty were on the features.

'I only came down for breakfast, to ask you that, and —and to tell you I was so sorry.'

'To be sure,' he replied at once. 'You are not well enough to be up. Lyddy will stay with you?'

'Yes, she is going to stay. I'll come and see you again, if I feel able.'

She offered her hand. He took it, held it a little, then said:

'Thyrza, is there anything on your mind, anything you don't wish to tell me just now, but in a day or two perhaps?'

'No, Gilbert, no! If you'll forgive me for behaving unkindly.'

'Dear, how can there be any forgiving, so long as I

love you? There must be blame before there is need of forgiveness, and I love you too well to think a reproachful thought.'

She bent her head and sobbed.

'Thyrza, is it any happiness to you to know that I love you?'

'Yes, it is. You are very good. I know I am making you suffer.'

'But I shall see the old face again, before long?'

'Soon. I shall be myself again soon.'

She left him and went upstairs. A minute or two after, Lydia knocked at the door.

'Thyrza has gone up?' she asked.

'Yes. Come here, Lydia!'

He spoke with abruptness. Lydia drew near.

'You know that she has asked me to put off our marriage for a week?'

'I didn't know that she was going to ask you now. I thought perhaps she wished it.'

'I can't ask you to betray your sister's secrets, but —Lyddy, you won't keep anything from me that I *ought* to know?'

He paused, then went on again with a shaking voice.

'There are some things that I *ought* to know, if—— You know that, Lyddy? You owe love to your sister first, but you owe something to me as well. There are some things you would have no right to keep from me. You might be doing both her and me the greatest wrong.'

Lydia could not face him. She tried to speak, but uttered only a meaningless word.

'Thyrza is ill,' he pursued. 'I can't ask her, as I feel I ought to, what has made her ill. Tell me this, as you are a good and a truthful girl. If I marry Thyrza, shall I be taking advantage of her weakness? Does she wish me to free her?'

'She doesn't! Indeed, Gilbert, she doesn't! You are her very best friend. All her life depends upon you. You won't break it off? Perhaps she will even be well enough by the end of the week. Remember how young she is, and how often she has strange fancies.'

'You tell me solemnly that Thyrza still wishes to be my wife?'

'She does. She wishes to be your wife, Gilbert.'

To Lydia her sister's fate hung in the balance. What she uttered was verbally true. Before rising, Thyrza had said: 'I will marry him.' In the possible breaking of this bond Lydia saw such a terrible danger that her instincts of absolute sincerity for once were overridden. If she spoke falsely, it was to save her sister. Thyrza once married, the face of life would be altered for her; this sudden passionate love would fall like a brief flame. Lydia had decided upon a bold step. As soon as it was possible, she would go and see Mr. Egremont, see him herself and, if he had any heart or any honour, prevail with him that Thyrza might be spared temptation. But the marriage

must first be over, and must be brought about at all costs.

In her life she had never spoken an untruth for her own advantage. Now, as she spoke, the sense that her course was chosen gave her courage. She looked Gilbert at length boldly in the face. His confidence in her was so great that, his own desires aiding, he believed her to the full. Thyrza's suffering, he said to himself, had not the grave meaning he had feared; it was something that must be sacred from his search.

So much power was there in Lydia's word, uttered for her sister's saving.

All day long it rained. Gilbert did not go from the house. He wrestled with hope, which was still only to be held by persistent effort. Sunshine would have aided him, but all day he looked upon a gloomy, wet street. At dinner-time he had all but made up his mind to go to work; the thought, however, was too hateful to him. And he felt it would be hard to meet men's faces. Perhaps there would be comfort by the morrow.

Thyrza did in fact come down for tea. She spoke only a few words, but she seemed stronger than in the morning. Lydia had a brighter face, too. They went up again together after the meal.

Another night passed. Lydia slept. She believed that the worst was over and that there might after all

be no postponement of the marriage. For Thyrza had become very quiet; she seemed worn out with struggle, and resigned. Her sleep, she said, had been good. Yet her eyelids were swollen; no doubt she had cried in the night.

Lydia had no intention of leaving home. Gilbert had gone to work, reassured by her report the last thing on the previous evening.

There was no more speech between the sisters on the subject of their thoughts. Through the morning Thyrza lay so still that Lydia, thinking her asleep, now and then stepped lightly and bent over her. Each time, however, she found the sad eyes gazing fixedly upwards. Thyrza just turned them to her, but without change of expression.

'Don't look at me like that, dear,' Lydia said once. 'It's as if you didn't know me.'

The reply was a brief smile.

Thyrza got up in the afternoon. About five o'clock, when Lydia was making tea, Mrs. Jarmey came with a message. She said Mr. Boddy had sent word that he wished to see Lydia particularly; he begged she would come during the evening.

'Who brought the message?' Lydia asked, going outside the door to speak with the landlady.

'A little boy,' was the answer. 'I never see him before, as I know.'

Lydia was disturbed. It might only mean that the old man was anxious at not having seen her for five or

six days, or that he was ill; but the fact of his living in the Bowers' house suggested another explanation. An answer was required; she sent back word that she would come.

'I shan't be more than half an hour away at the very longest,' she said, when she reluctantly prepared to go out after tea. 'Wouldn't you like to go downstairs just for that time, dear?'

'No, Lyddy, I'll stay.'

Thyrza had left her chair, and stood with her hand resting on the mantelpiece. She did not turn her head.

'How funny you look with your hair like that!'

Thyrza had declined to have her hair braided, and had coiled it herself in a new way. She made no reply.

'Good-bye, pet!' Lydia said, coming near.

Thyrza did not move. She was looking downwards at the fire. Lydia touched her; she started, and, with a steady gaze, said, 'Good-bye, Lyddy!'

'I do wish I hadn't to go. But I shall be very quick.'

'Yes. Good-bye!'

They kissed each other, and Lydia hastened on her errand.

Her absence did not last much longer than the time she had set. Mr. Boddy had heard from Mrs. Bower all the story about Egremont. He gave no faith to it,

but wished to warn Lydia that such gossip was afloat, and to receive from her an authoritative denial. She declared it to be false from beginning to end. Without a moment's hesitation she did this, having determined that there was no middle course. She denied that Thyrza had been to the library. Whoever originated the story had done so in malice. She enjoined upon him to contradict it without reserve.

She felt as if she were being hunted by merciless beasts. To escape them, any means were justifiable. Of the Bowers she thought with bitter hatred. No wrong to herself could have excited all her fiercest emotions as did this attack upon her sister. Running homewards, she felt the will and the strength to take the life of her enemy. She had entered the Bowers' house, and left it, by the private door; it was well that she had met no one.

She remembered that Thyrza must not discover her excitement, and went up the stairs slowly, regaining breath, trying to smooth her face. A fable to account for Mr. Boddy's summons was ready on her tongue. She entered, and found an empty room.

So Thyrza had gone down to Mrs. Grail after all. That was good. The poor girl was making a brave struggle, and would conquer herself yet. If only Bower's gossip could be kept from Gilbert. But there was still a long time till Monday, still two whole days, and Bower, determined as he evidently was to work mischief, would not neglect the supreme opportunity.

It would have been better if Gilbert had not returned to work.

She took off her things.

What was that lying on the table? An envelope, a dirty one which had been in the drawer for a long time; on it was written 'Lyddy.' It was Thyrza's writing. Lydia opened it. Inside was a rough piece of white paper, torn off a sheet in which something had been wrapped. It was written upon, and the writing said this:

'I have gone away. I can't marry Gilbert, and I can't tell him the truth. Remember your promise. Some day I shall come back to you, when everything is different. Remember your promise, so that Gilbert can go to the library just the same. No harm will come to me. Good-bye, my dear, dear sister. If you love me, you will say you know nothing, so that it will be all right for Gilbert. Good-bye, Lyddy, darling.'

Crushing the paper in her hand, Lydia, just as she was, ran out into the street. It was not yet dark. Instinctively, after one glance towards Kennington Road, she took the opposite way and made for Newport Street. Thyrza would communicate with Totty Nancarrow, if with anyone at all; she would not go there at once, but Totty must be won over to aid in discovering the child and bringing her back.

It rained, not heavily, but enough to dew Lydia's hair in a few minutes. Little she thought of that. Thyrza wandering alone—straying off into some far

part of London; Thyrza, ill as she was—with at most a few pence to procure lodging for this one night—alone among what dangers! The thought was fire in her brain.

She was in Paradise Street, and someone stood in her way, speaking.

'Lydia! Where ever are you going like that?'

It was Mary Bower. Lydia glared at her.

'How dare you speak to me! I hate you!'

And with a wild gesture, almost a blow at the girl, she rushed on.

Totty had just come in from work. Lydia scarcely waited for a reply to her knock before she burst into the room.

'Totty! Will you help me? Thyrza has left me—gone away. I was out for half an hour. She left a note for me, to say good-bye. Help me to find her! Do you know anything? Can you think where she'd go?'

Totty was on her knees, lighting a fire. In her amazement she made no effort to rise. A lighted piece of paper was in her hand; forgetting it, she let the flame creep on till it burnt her fingers. Then she stood up.

'What does she say in the note?' she asked with deliberation.

Lydia opened her hand and spread out the crumpled paper. She was going to read aloud, but checked herself and looked at the other piteously.

'You know all about it, don't you? Thyrza told you?'

'I suppose I know pretty well,' Totty replied, in the same deliberate and distant way.

'Has she said anything to you about going away?'

'I don't know as she has.'

'Then look what she's written.'

Totty hesitated, then said:

'Thank you, I'd rather not. It's not my business. If I was you, I'd speak to Mr. Ackroyd. I know nothing about Thyrza.'

'To Mr. Ackroyd?' exclaimed Lydia. 'But I'm sure she won't see him. It's you 'll hear from her, if anybody does. Can't you think of any place she'd be likely to go? Hasn't she ever said anything in talking? You wouldn't keep it back, just because you don't like me? It's my sister—she's all I have; you know she can't look out for herself like you and me could. And she's been ill since Monday. Won't you help me if you can, just because I'm in trouble?'

'I'd help you if I could,' replied the other, not unmoved by the appeal, but still distant. 'I'm quite sure Thyrza won't let me know where she is. If you take my advice, you'll see Mr. Ackroyd.'

In her agitation Lydia could not reflect upon the complicated details of the case. She never doubted that Totty knew the truth; in this, we know, Luke had unintentionally deceived her. Perhaps the advice to consult Ackroyd was good; perhaps he had learned

something more since Wednesday night, something that Totty also knew but did not care to communicate herself.

'I'll try and find him,' Lydia said. 'But if you *do* hear anything you wouldn't keep it from me?'

'You'll hear just as soon as I do,' was the reply.

Lydia turned away, feeling that the girl's coldness was a cruelty, wondering at it. She herself could not have behaved so to one in dire need.

She was going away, but Totty stopped her.

'You can't go back like that, in the rain. Take my umbrella.'

'What do I care for the rain!' Lydia cried. 'I must find Thyrza. I thought you pretended to be her friend.'

She hastened into the street. Not many yards from the door she met the man she desired to see. Ackroyd was coming to ask for Totty, for the first time since Tuesday night. Lydia drew him to the opposite side of the way, and hurriedly told him, showing him the scrap of paper.

'I've been to Totty,' she added. 'She didn't seem to wish to help me; she spoke as if she didn't care, and said I'd better ask you. Do you know anything more?'

He was mute at first. His mind naturally turned to one thought. Then he said, speaking slowly:

'I know nothing more, except that lots of people have heard Bower's story. Does Grail know?'

'Not unless he has heard since this morning.'

'I haven't seen much of him to-day, but I noticed he looked very queer.'

'That's because Thyrza asked him to put off the wedding for a week. I never thought she'd leave me. We talked about everything that night after I left you. I pretended I'd found it out myself; I durstn't let her know that other people had noticed anything. She had a dreadful night, but she seemed better since.'

'And did she tell you—everything?'

'Everything! She said he'd never spoken a word to her that he shouldn't. I'm sure it was the truth; Thyrza wouldn't have deceived me like that. He's gone away, somewhere out of London.'

Luke stopped her. He looked closely at her through the dusk, and said in a low voice:

'He's gone away? Did *she* tell you he was going away?'

'Yes. He said good-bye to her, and hoped she would be happy.'

'But, Lydia—if he's gone away—and now *she's* gone——'

Lydia understood him.

'Oh! Don't think that!' she said, her eyes full of fear. 'No, no! I'm sure that isn't true! He'd never said a word to her. He hadn't given her to think he cared for her. She cried because he didn't.'

'But if she's so mad with love of him,' Luke said, dropping his eyes, 'who knows what she might do? You'd never have thought she could leave you like this.'

The rain was falling more heavily. As Lydia stood, unable to utter any argument against him, Ackroyd saw that her hair was quite wet.

'You mustn't stand out here,' he said. 'Come round into Paradise Street with me, and I'll get you something of my sister's to go home in. Poor girl! You came out like this as soon as you'd found she was gone? Come quick, or you'll get your death.'

She accompanied him without speaking. Her mind was working on the suggestion he had uttered. Against her will he compelled her to step into the house whilst he procured a hat and a garment for her. He took care that no one saw her, and when she was clad, he went out with her, carrying an umbrella for her protection.

'Don't come with me,' she said.

'Yes, you must let me. I was going to try and see you to-night, Lydia, to ask what——'

'And I wanted to see you. I felt I must tell you how well everything seemed to be going. Oh, and now —— How shall I tell Gilbert? How *shall* I tell him? What ought I to do, Mr. Ackroyd? Thyrza made me promise faithfully I wouldn't tell her secret. She says that, in the note. I'm sure she hasn't gone—gone to him. She couldn't marry Gilbert, and yet she doesn't want him to lose the library. That's why she's gone; I know it is. She believes I shall keep my promise. But what must I do? How can I pretend I don't know anything?'

'I don't think you can.'

'I didn't care for anything as long as it helped her. Mr. Boddy sent for me just now—that was why I had to go out. Mrs. Bower had been telling him. I said it was all a lie from beginning to end. Didn't I do right, Mr. Ackroyd? I'd say and do anything for Thyrza. But how can I keep it from Gilbert now?'

'You can't, Lydia. He's bound to hear from somebody. And if you feel so sure that she hasn't gone——'

'She hasn't! She hasn't! You promised me you wouldn't think harm of her.'

'Indeed I won't. But Grail's bound to know. I can't see that you'll make it a bit better by denying.'

'But my promise to Thyrza! The last thing she ever asked of me. And Gilbert 'll refuse the place; I know he will.'

'Yes, he will. There's no man could take it after this. I'm right down sorry for poor Grail.'

They were in Walnut Tree Walk by this time.

'Don't come any farther,' Lydia said. 'Thank you for being so kind to me. Here, take these things of your sister's; you can just carry them back—or I'll leave them, if you like.'

'No, you shan't have that trouble. If Gilbert's home, you ought to tell him now. He'll go to the police station, and ask them to help to find her. Let me know at once if you hear anything. She may come back.'

'No, she won't.'

'Run into the house at once.'

The parlour door opened as she entered the passage. Gilbert came out.

'Where has Thyrza gone to?' he asked, after examining her for an instant.

She could not speak, and could not stir from the place. Her hope had been to have time before she saw him.

'Lydia, where has Thyrza gone?'

She stepped into the room. The piece of paper was still crushed within her hand; she held it closer still.

'She's gone away, Gilbert. I don't know where. I had to go out, and when I came back she was gone. Perhaps she'll come back.'

Mrs. Grail was in the background. She was supporting herself by a chair; her face gave proof of some agitation just experienced. Gilbert was very pale, but when Lydia ended he seemed to master himself and spoke with an unnatural calm.

'Have you heard anything,' he asked, 'of a calumny the Bowers have been spreading, about your sister and Mr. Egremont?'

'Yes. I have heard it.'

'When did it first come to your knowledge?'

'On Wednesday night. Mr. Ackroyd told me.'

'And did Thyrza hear of it?'

'No, Gilbert. I think not.'

He moved in surprise.

'You say she has gone? What makes you think she has left us?'

To hide anything now was worse than useless. Without speaking, she held to him the scrap of paper. He, having read, turned to his mother.

'Will you let us be alone, mother?'

The poor old woman went with bowed head from the room. Gilbert's voice dropped to a lower note.

'Lydia, as you have shown me this, you must have decided that you cannot keep the promise which is spoken of here.'

'I can't keep it, Gilbert, because you might think worse of Thyrza if I do.'

'Think worse? Then you suppose I believe what is said about her—about Thyrza?'

'I can't think you believe what Mr. Bower *wishes* people to, but you can't know how little she's been to blame.'

He was silent, then said:

'I came home a few minutes ago, thinking that what Bunce has just told was a mere lie, set afloat by someone who wished us harm. I thought Thyrza knew of the lie, and that it had made her ill—that she could not bring herself to speak to me of it. But I see there's something more.'

She stood before him like one guilty. His calmness was terrible to her. She seemed to feel in herself all the anguish which he was repressing. He continued:

'You told me yesterday morning that Thyrza still wished to marry me. This note shows me why you said that, and in what sense you meant it. I don't blame you, Lydia; you were loyal to your sister. But I must ask you something else now, and your answer must be the simple truth. Does Thyrza love Mr. Egremont?'

'Yes, Gilbert.'

She said it with failing voice, and, as soon as she had spoken, burst into tears.

'Oh, I have broken the promise I made to my dear one! The last thing she asked, and perhaps I shall never see her again! What could I do, Gilbert? If I kept it back, you'd have thought there was something worse. She seems to have behaved cruelly to you, but you don't know what she's gone through. Thyrza, my darling! Why have you left me! Why didn't she ask me to go away with her! We might have kept together, as we've always done. She's so ill; she'll go somewhere and die, and I shall never hear her speak to me again! I've been unkind to her so often; she doesn't know how I love her! Gilbert, help me to find her! I can't live without my sister. Don't be angry with her, Gilbert; she's suffered dreadfully; if you only knew! She tried so hard. Her last thought was about you, and how she could spare you. Forgive her, and bring her back to me. What shall we do to find her? Oh, I *can't* lose her, my little sister, my dear one!'

One would have thought Gilbert had no grief of his own, so anxiously did he try to comfort her.

'Lyddy,' he said, when she could listen to him, 'you are *my* sister, and will always be. If I could think unkindly of Thyrza now, I should show that I was never worthy of her. Don't hurt me by saying such things. We will find her; have no fear, we will find her.'

'And you'll do as she wished? You'll still go to the library?'

'I can't think of myself yet, Lyddy. You must have her back again, and there'll be time enough to think of trifles.'

'But let me tell you all I know, Gilbert. He doesn't love her; you mustn't think that. There's never been a word between them. She went to help him with the books, and so it came on her.'

'It's true, then,' he said gravely, 'that they met there?'

'He didn't encourage her. She told me again and again he didn't. She went on Wednesday morning, and he never came. That was on purpose, I'm sure.'

'But why wasn't I told about the books?'

'He wanted to surprise you. And now he's gone away, Gilbert. He told her he wouldn't be back till after her marriage.'

'He's gone away?'

She raised her face, and continued eagerly:

'You see why he went, don't you? I had hard

thoughts of him at first, but now I know I was wrong. You think so much of him; you know he wouldn't be so cowardly and wicked. Thyrza told me the solemn truth; I would die rather than doubt her word. You must believe her, Gilbert. It's all so hard! She couldn't help it. And you mustn't think harm of him!'

He said under his breath:

'I must try not to.'

She sat down, overcome, yielding herself to voiceless misery. It was a long time before Gilbert spoke.

'Do you know where he is gone to, Lyddy?'

'No, I don't.'

Again silence. Then he moved, and looked at the clock.

'Will you sit with my mother? This is a great blow to her as well, and it is hard to bear at her age. I will go out and see what I can do. Don't fear, we'll find her. You shall soon have her back. Do you feel able to sit with mother?'

'Yes, I will, Gilbert.'

'Thank you. It will be kindness. I don't think I shall be very late.'

In passing her, he just touched her hand.

In the meanwhile, Ackroyd had returned to Newport Street. He sent up word by the landlady that he wished to see Totty. The latter sent a reply to him

that perhaps she would be coming out in about an hour, but could not be certain.

He waited, standing in the rain, over against the house. Perhaps twenty minutes passed; then he saw the girl come forth.

'We can't talk here,' Luke said, joining her. 'Will you come under the archway yonder?'

'I don't see that we've got so much to talk about,' Totty answered, indifferently.

'Yes, I've several things to ask you.'

'All right. But I can't wait out in the cold for long.'

They went in the direction away from Paradise Street, and found shelter under a black vault of the railway. A train roared above their heads as they entered.

'I've just seen Lydia Trent,' he began. 'Did you expect that anything of this kind would happen?'

'I've told you already that I have nothing to do with Thyrza and her goings on. I told Lydia she'd better go to you if she wanted to find her sister. I hope you told her all you know.'

'What do you mean by that? How should I be able to help her to find Thyrza?'

'Oh, don't bother me!' Totty exclaimed, with impatience. 'I'm sick of it. If you've brought me out to talk in this way, you might as well have let it alone.'

'What are you driving at, Totty? I tell you I don't understand you. Speak plainly, if you please. You think that I know where Thyrza is?'

'I suppose you're as likely to as anybody.'

'Why? Confound it, why?'

She shrugged her shoulders, and turned away. He pressed his question with growing impatience.

'Why, what did you come telling me the other night?' cried Totty at length. 'It was like your impudence.'

'What did I tell you? I didn't tell you anything. I asked if you knew of something, and you said you did. I don't see how I was impudent. After hearing Bower's tale it was likely I should come and speak to you about it.'

'Bower's tale? What tale?'

'You don't know that Bower's found it all out, and is telling everybody?'

'Found all *what* out? I haven't been to the shop for a week. What do you mean?'

Ackroyd checked some impulsive words, and recommenced gravely:

'Look here, Totty. Will you please tell me in plain words what you supposed I was asking you about on Tuesday night?'

'All right. It's nothing to me. You'd found out somehow that Thyrza was foolish enough to want to have you instead of Mr. Grail, and so you was so kind as to come and tell me. I quite understood; there's

no need of saying "I beg your pardon." You may go your way, and I go mine.'

'And you mean to say you believed that! Well, I don't wonder at you being in the sulks. And that's why you send Lydia to me to ask about Thyrza? By the Lord, if I ever heard the like of that! Well, I've got a fair lot of cheek, but I couldn't quite manage that.'

'Then what *did* you mean?' she cried angrily.

'Why, nothing at all. But what did *you* mean by saying you knew all about it?'

'About as much as you did,' she answered coldly.

'H'm. Then we both meant nothing. I'll say good-night, Totty.'

'No you won't. You'll please to tell me what you *did* mean!'

He was about to answer lightly, but altered his intention and said:

'I can't do that. It's not my business.'

'As you please. I shall go and ask Mrs. Bower what's going on.'

'I can't prevent you. But listen here, Totty. If you repeat what they tell you—if you repeat it once—you're not the girl I thought you. It's more than half a cursed lie, and you can't tell one half the story without meaning the other.'

'I shall know what to think when I've heard it, Mr. Ackroyd. And as to repeating, I shall do as I think fit.'

'Look here! When you've heard that story, you'll just go and say to everybody that ever mentions it to you that it's a lie from beginning to end. You understand me?'

'I shall do as I please.'

'No, you'll do as *I* please!'

'Indeed! And who made you my master, Mr. Ackroyd?'

'I've nothing more to say, but you've heard me. And you'll do it, because your own heart 'll tell you it's the right thing to do. I don't often use words like that, but I mean it to-night. Good-bye!'

She allowed him to walk away.

CHAPTER XI.

A BIRD OF THE AIR.

When Paula had been three or four days wedded, it occurred to her to examine her husband's countenance. They were at breakfast at Biarritz, and certain words that fell from Mr. Dalmaine, as he sat sideways from the table with his newspaper, led her eyes to rest for a few moments on his face. He was smiling, but with depressed brows. Paula noted the smile well, and it occupied her thoughts now and then during the day. She was rather in want of something to think of just then, feeling a little lonely, and wishing her mother, or her brother, or somebody whom she really knew, were at hand to talk to.

It was with that same peculiar smile—the bushy eyebrows closing together, the lips very tight—that her husband approached her late one evening in the first week of May. They were in their house in Kensington now; there had been a dinner party, the last guest was gone, and Paula sat in the drawing-room, thinking how she had impressed a certain polite old member of Parliament, a man whom it was worth

while impressing. Mr. Dalmaine took a seat near her, and leaned forward with his hands clasped between his knees.

He asked: 'What were you saying to Puggerton when I passed and looked at you—you remember? Something about working-men and intelligent voting.'

'Oh, I was telling that tale of yours about the candidate whose name was Beere, and who got in so easily for——'

'I thought so,' he remarked, before she had finished. 'And you went on to say that I thought it a pity that there were not more men on our side with names of similar sound?'

'Yes, I did. Mr. Puggerton laughed ever so much.'

'H'm. Paula, my dear, I think it won't be amiss if you leave off talking about politics.'

'Why? I'm sure I've been talking very cleverly all the evening. Mr. Liggs said I was an acquisition to—something, I forget what.'

'No doubt. For all that, I think you had better give your attention to other things. In fact—it's not a polite thing to say—but you're making a fool of yourself.'

Paula's features hardened. She looked very beautiful to-night, and had, in truth, been charming—so irrepressible she was, so queenly and yet so childish. Her appearance suffered when the delicate curves of her face fell into hard lines. It was noteworthy

that the smile her husband now wore always caused this change in her expression.

'I'm glad you know that it isn't polite,' she answered, sourly. 'You often need to be told.'

'I hope not. But you try my patience a little now and then. Surely it's better that I should save you from making these ridiculous mistakes. Once or twice this week I've heard most absurd remarks of yours repeated. Please remember that it isn't only yourself you—stultify. Politics may be a joke for you; for me it is a serious pursuit. I mustn't have people associating my name with all kinds of nonsensical chatter. I have a career before me, Paula.'

He said it with dignity, resting a hand on each knee, and letting his smile fade into a look of ministerial importance.

'Why are you ashamed of having your stories repeated?'

'Well, I told you that when—when I didn't think of the need of measuring my words with you. I've been more cautious lately. If you had any understanding for such things at all, I could explain that a trifle like that might be made to tell heavily against me by some political enemy. Once more—if you are drawn into talk of that kind, you must always speak of working-people with the utmost respect—with reverence. No matter how intimate a friend you may be speaking with—even with your mother, or your father——'

Paula laughed.

'You think papa would believe me if I told him I reverenced working-men, the free and independent electors?'

'There again! That's a phrase you must *not* use; I say it absolutely; you must forget the phrase. Yes, your father must believe you.'

'Do you think he believes *you*?'

Mr. Dalmaine drew himself up.

'I don't know what you mean, Paula.'

'And I don't know what *you* mean. You are ridiculous.'

'Excuse me. That is the word that applies to you. However, I have no wish to wrangle. Let it be understood that you gradually abandon conversation such as this of to-night. For the sake of appearances you must make no sudden and obvious change. If you take my advice, you'll cultivate talk of a light, fashionable kind. Literature you mustn't interfere with; I shouldn't advise you to say much about art, except that of course you may admire the pictures at the Grosvenor Gallery. You'd better read the Society journals carefully. In fact, keep to the sphere which is distinctly womanly.'

'And what about your anxiety to see women take part in politics?'

'There are exceptions to every rule. And the programme of the platform, be good enough to try and understand, doesn't always apply to domestic circum-

stances. If one happens to have married a very pretty and delightful girl——'

'Oh, of course!'

'I repeat, a very pretty and charming girl, with no turn whatever for seriousness, one can't pretend to offer an instance in one's own house of the political woman. Once more understand—in England politics must be pursued with gravity. We don't fly about and chatter and scream like Frenchmen. No man will succeed with us in politics who has not a reputation for solid earnestness. Therefore, the more stupid a man, the better chance he has. I am naturally fond of a joke, but to get a name for that kind of thing would ruin me. You are clever, Paula, very clever in your way, but you don't, and you never will, understand politics. I beg of you not to damage my prospects. Cultivate a safe habit of speech. You may talk of the events of the season, of pigeon shooting, of horse racing, of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and so on; it's what everybody expects in a fashionable lady. Of course if you *had* been able to take up politics in earnest—but, never mind. I like you very well as you are. How well you look in that dress!'

'I rather think you're right,' Paula remarked, after a short pause, turning about a bracelet on her wrist. 'It'll be better if you go your way and I go mine.'

'Precisely; though that's an unkind way of putting it.'

He sat looking at the ground, and a smile of another kind came to his face.

'By-the-by, I've something to tell you—something that'll amuse you very much, and that you *may* talk about, just as much as you like.'

She made no reply.

'Your friend Egremont has come out in a new part—his first appearance in it, absolutely, though he can't be said to have created the *rôle*. He's run away with a girl from Lambeth—in fact, the girl who was just going to be married to his right hand man, his librarian.'

Paula looked up in astonishment; then, with indignant incredulity, she said:

'What do you mean? What's your object in talking nonsense of that kind?'

'Again and again I have to tell you that I never talk nonsense; I am a politician. I heard the news this morning from Tasker. The man Grail—Egremont's librarian—was to have been married two days ago, Monday. Last Friday night his bride-elect disappeared. She's a very pretty girl, Tasker tells me—wonderfully pretty for one in her position, a work-girl. Egremont seems to have thought it a pity to let her be wasted. He's been meeting her secretly for some time—in the library, of all places, whilst the man Grail was at work, poor fellow! And at last he carried her off. There's no getting on his track, I'm told. The question is: What will become of the embryo

library? The whole thing's about the finest joke I've heard for some time.'

Paula had reddened. Her eyes flashed anger.

'I don't know whether you've invented it,' she said, 'or whether your secretary has, but I know there isn't one word of truth in it.'

'My dear child, it's no invention at all. The affair is the common talk of Lambeth.'

'Then do you mean to say Mr. Egremont has married this girl?'

'Well, I don't know that we'll discuss that point,' Dalmaine replied, twiddling his thumbs. 'There's no information to hand.'

'I don't believe it! I tell you I don't believe it! Mr. Egremont is engaged to my cousin Annabel; and besides, he couldn't do such a thing. He isn't a man of that kind.'

'Your experience of men is not great, my dear Paula.'

'I don't care! I know Mr. Egremont. Even if you said he'd married her, it isn't true. You mustn't judge every man by——'

'You were going to say?'

She rose and swept her train over a few yards of floor. Then she came back and stood before him.

'You tell me that people are saying this?'

'A considerable number of my respected constituents —and their wives—are saying it. Tasker shall give you judicial evidence, if you please.'

'I'm sure I'm not going to talk to Mr. Tasker. I dislike him too much to believe a word he says.'

'Of course. But he is absolutely trustworthy. I called at Egremont's this afternoon to make sure that he was away from home. Now there is something for you to talk about, Paula.'

'I shall take very good care that I don't speak a word of it to anyone. It's contemptible to make up such a story about a man just because you dislike him.'

'It seemed to me that you were not remarkably fond of him two months or so ago.'

'Did it?' she said, sarcastically. 'If I know little of men, it's certain you don't know much more of women.'

He leaned back and laughed. And whilst he laughed Paula quitted the room.

Paula still kept up her habit of letter-writing. After breakfast next morning she sat in her pretty boudoir, writing to Annabel. After sentences referring to Annabel's expected arrival in London for the season, she added this:

'A very shocking story has just come to my ears. I oughtn't really to repeat it to you, dear, and yet in another way it is my duty to. Mr. Egremont has disappeared, and with him the girl who was just going to marry his librarian—the poor man you know of from him. There are no means of knowing whether they have

run away together to be married—or not. Everybody knows about it; it is the talk of Lambeth. My husband heard of it at once. The girl is said to be very good-looking. I wish I could refuse to believe it, but *there is no doubt whatever*. You ought to know at once; but perhaps you will have heard already. I never knew anything more dreadful, and I can't say what I feel.'

There was not much more in the letter. Having fastened up the envelope, Paula let it lie on her desk, whilst she walked about the room. Each time she passed the desk she looked at the letter, and lingered a little. Once she took it up and seemed about to open it again. Her expression all this time was very strange; her colour came and went; she bit her lips, and twisted her fingers together. At length she rang the bell, and when the servant came, gave the letter to be posted immediately.

Five minutes later she was in her bedroom, sitting in a low chair, crying like a very unhappy child.

The letter reached Eastbourne two days before that appointed for the departure of Annabel and her father for London. They had accepted Mrs. Tyrrell's invitation to her house; Mr. Newthorpe might remain only a fortnight, or might stay through the season—but Annabel would not come back to Eastbourne before August. She said little, but her father saw with what pleasure she anticipated this change. He wondered

whether it would do her good or harm. Her books lay almost unused; of late she had attended chiefly to music, in such hours as were not spent out of doors. Mr. Newthorpe's health was as far improved as he could hope it ever would be. He too looked forward to associating once more with the few friends he had in London.

It was in the evening that Annabel, entering after a long drive with her father, found Paula's letter. She took it from the hall in passing to her room.

At dinner she spoke very little. After the meal she said that she wished to walk over to The Chestnuts. She left her father deep in a French novel—he read much more of the lighter literature now than formerly.

Mrs. Ormonde was upstairs with her children; they were singing to her; Annabel heard the choir of young voices as she entered the garden. The servant who went to announce her brought back a request that she would ascend and hear a song.

She did so. The last song was to be 'Annie Laurie,' in which the children were perfect. Annabel took the offered seat without speaking, and listened.

Bessie Bunce was near Mrs. Ormonde. When the song was over she said:

'I'd like to hear Miss Trent sing that again; wouldn't you, mum?'

'Yes, I should, Bessie. Perhaps we shall have her here again some day.'

Mrs. Ormonde went down with Annabel to the

drawing-room. She was in a happy mood to-night, and, as they descended together, she put her arm playfully about the girl's waist.

'I wonder where Mr. Grail has taken her?' she said. 'I can't get any news from Mr. Egremont. I wrote to Jersey, and behold the letter is returned to me, with "Gone and left no address." I wonder whether he's back in town!'

'I have some news of him,' Annabel said quietly.

'Have you?'

There was no reply till they were in the drawing-room; then Annabel held out her cousin's letter.

'Will you read that?'

Mrs. Ormonde complied, Annabel watching her face the while. The girl looked for indignation, for scornful disbelief; she saw something quite different. Mrs. Ormonde's hand trembled, but in a moment she had overcome all weakness.

'Sit down, dear,' she said, calmly. 'You have just received this? Yes, I see the date.'

Annabel remained standing.

'Your letter is returned from Jersey,' she remarked, with steady voice. 'Paula mentions no dates. Did he go to Jersey at all?'

'I have no means of knowing, save his own declaration, when he said good-bye to me on Thursday of last week. And he told me he was going to his old quarters at St. Aubin's.'

'Do you give credit to this, Mrs. Ormonde?'

'Annabel, I can say nothing. Yet, no! I do not believe it until it is confirmed beyond all doubt. I owe that to him, as you also do.'

'But it does not seem to you incredible. I saw that on your face.'

'One thing suggested here *is* incredible, wholly incredible. If there is any truth in the story at all, by this time she is his wife. So much we know, you and I, Annabel.'

'Yes.'

'Remember, it is possible that he is in Jersey. The old rooms may have been occupied.'

'The people would know where he had gone, I think. Though if he—if he was not alone, probably he would go to a new place at once. He may have told you the truth in saying he was going to Jersey.'

'Then it was needless to add the untruth. I did not ask him where he would live. Sit down, dear.'

'Thank you. I shall not stay now. I thought it was better to come to you with this at once. Please destroy the letter.'

Mrs. Ormonde mused.

'Can you still go to your aunt's?' she asked, when Annabel moved for leave-taking.

'You are taking the truth for granted, Mrs. Ormonde.'

'I mean that we have no way of discovering whether it is true or not.'

'It will make no change. I shall not speak of it to father. There will be no change, in any case.'

Again there fell a short silence.

'I can only wait in hope of hearing from him,' Mrs. Ormonde said.

'Of course. If my aunt says anything to me about it, I will write to you. Good-bye.'

'I shall see you to-morrow, as we arranged?'

'Oh yes. But, please, we won't refer again to this.'

They parted as on an ordinary occasion.

But Annabel did not go home at once. She walked down to the shore, and stood for a long time looking upon the dim sea. It was the very spot where Thyrza had stood that Sunday morning when she came out in the early sunlight.

Annabel had often thought how fitting it was that at this period of her life she should leave the calm, voiceless shore of Ullswater for the neighbourhood of the never-resting waves. She looked back upon the peace 'that is among the lonely hills' as on something which she could never again recover. Between then and now stood a vision of death, and it was as if the near approach of the phantom had made her sense of living so vivid that she could no longer be content with placid, half-conscious growth; she clung passionately to the world and desired the fulness of its enjoyment. The sea had a voice of craving, and her heart responded with desire for completion of her being, with desire for love.

The thought that she would be near Walter Egremont had a great part in her anticipation of London.

She was not hitherto sure that she loved him. It was rather, 'Let me see him again, and discover how his presence affects me.' Yet his manifest coldness at the last meeting had caused her much vague heart-ache. She blamed herself for being so cold: was it not natural that he should take his tone from her? He would naturally watch to see how she bore herself to him, and, remembering Ullswater, he could not press for more than she seemed ready to give. Yet her reserve had been involuntary; assuredly she was not then moved with a longing to recover what she had rejected.

There was a change after the meeting with Thyrza Trent. It seemed to her very foolish to remember so persistently that Egremont had said nothing of the girl's strange loveliness, yet she could not help thinking of the omission as something significant. She even recollected that, in speaking to her of Thyrza, he had turned his eyes seaward. Such trifles could mean nothing as regarded Egremont, but how in reference to herself? How if she knew that he had given his love to another woman? I think that would be hard to bear.

And it was hard to bear.

Passion had won it over everything. He had taken Thyrza at the eleventh hour, and now she was married to him. She did not doubt it; she felt that Mrs.

Ormonde did not doubt it. It *had* meant something —that failure to speak of the girl's beauty, that evasion with the eyes.

The night was cold, but she sat down by the shore, and let her head droop as she listened to the sea-dirge. She could love him, now that it was in vain. She knew now the warm yearning for his presence which at Ullswater had never troubled her, and it was too late. No tears came to her eyes; she did not even breathe a deeper breath. Most likely it would pass without a single outbreak of grief. It seemed too great a thing to lament for; as well lament inconsolably for some disaster conatal with her life.

And perhaps the thought of another's misery somewhat dulled the edge of her own. Gilbert Grail was only a name to her, but he lived very vividly in her imagination. Of course she had idealised him, as was natural in a woman thinking of a man who has been represented to her as full of native nobleness. For him, as for herself, her heart was heavy. She knew that he must return to his hated day-labour, and how would it now be embittered! What anguish of resentment! What despair of frustrate passion!

She wished she could know him, and take his hand, and soothe him with a woman's tenderness. His lot was harder than hers; nay, it was mockery to compare them.

Annabel rose, murmuring old words:

'Therefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work which is done under the sun.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE IDEALIST AND HIS FRIEND.

EGREMONT alighted one evening at Charing Cross. He came direct from Paris, and was alone. His absence from England had extended over a fortnight.

He did not look better for his travels; one in the crowd waiting for the arrival of the train might have supposed that he had suffered on the sea-passage and was not yet quite recovered. Having bidden a porter look after the bag which was his only luggage, he walked to the book-stall to buy a periodical that he wished to take home with him. And there he came face to face with two people whom he knew. Mr. Dalmaine was just turning from the stall with an evening paper, and by his side was Paula. Egremont had not seen either since their marriage.

The three pairs of eyes focussed on one point. Egremont saluted—did it nervously, for he was prepared for nothing less than an encounter with acquaintances. He saw a smile come to Paula's face; he saw her on the point of extending her hand; then, to his amazement, he heard a sharp 'Paula!' from Dalmaine,

and husband and wife turned from him. It was the cut direct, or would have been, but for that little piece of impulsiveness on Paula's part. The two walked towards one of the platforms, and it was plain that Dalmaine was delivering himself in an undertone of a gentlemanly reproof.

He stood disconcerted. What might this mean? Was it merely an urbane way of reminding him that he had neglected certain civilities demanded by the social code? Dalmaine would doubtless be punctilious; he was a rising politician. Yet the insult was too pronounced; it suggested some grave ground of offence.

As the cab bore him homewards, he felt that this was an ominous event for the moment of his return to London. He had had no heart to come back; from the steamer he had gazed sadly on the sunny shores of France, and on landing at Dover the island air was hard to breathe. Yet harder the air of London streets. The meeting in the station became a symbol of stiff, awkward, pretentious Anglicism. He had unkind sentiments towards his native country, and asked himself how he was going to live in England henceforth.

His room in Great Russell Street seemed to have suffered neglect during his absence; his return was unexpected; everything seemed unhomely and unwelcoming. The great front of the British Museum frowned, as if to express disapproval of such aimless running hither and thither in one who should be spending his days soberly and strenuously; even the pigeons

walked or flew with balance of purpose, with English respectability. It seemed to have rained all day; the evening sky was heavy and featureless.

The landlady presented herself. She was grieved exceedingly that she had not known of Mr. Egremont's coming, but everything should be made comfortable in less than no time. He would have a fire? To be sure; it was a little chilly, though really 'summer has come upon us all at a jump, whilst you've been away, sir.'

'I got your telegram, sir, that I wasn't to send any letters on. Gentlemen have called, and I——'

'Indeed? Who has called?'

'Why, sir, on the day after you went—I dare say it was nine o'clock in the evening, or a little later—someone came, wishing very much to see you. He wouldn't give a name. I don't think it was a gentleman; it seemed like somebody coming on business. He was very anxious to have your address. Of course I didn't give it. I just said that any note he liked to leave should be forwarded at once.'

'A dark man, with a beard? A working man?'

'No doubt the one you're thinking of, sir. He called again—let me see, four or five days after.'

'Called again? Then it couldn't be the man I mean.'

He entered into a fuller description of Gilbert Grail. The landlady identified the caller as Grail beyond all doubt.

'What day was it?'

'Why, sir,' it 'ud be Wednesday; yes, Wednesday.'

'H'm! And you told him I had left Jersey?'

'Yes, sir. He said he knew that, and that——'

'Said he knew it?' repeated Egremont, astonished.

'Yes, sir, and that he wished to see if you had got home again.'

'Has he been since?'

'No, sir, but—I was coming in a night or two after, sir, and I saw him standing on the opposite side of the way, looking at the house. He hadn't called, however, and he didn't again.'

Egremont bent his eyes on the ground, and delayed a moment before asking:

'Who else has been?'

'A gentleman; I don't know who it was. The servant went to the door. He said he only wished to know if you were in town or not. He wouldn't leave a name.'

Egremont's face changed to annoyance. He did not care to pursue the subject.

'Let me have something to eat, please,' he said.

The landlady having withdrawn, he at once sat down to his desk and wrote a note. It was to Grail, and ran in substance:

'I am just back from the Continent. Am I right in thinking that it is you who have called here twice in my absence? If so, your second call was at a time when I hoped you were out of London. Do let me see

you as soon as possible. Of course you received my letter from Jersey? Shall I come to you, or will you come here? I will stay in to-night. I send this by a messenger, as I wish you to receive it immediately.'

The landlady had a son at home, a lad of sixteen. Having discovered that the boy's services were available, Egremont gave him directions. He was to take a cab and drive to the library in Brook Street. If he should not find Grail there, he was to proceed to Walnut Tree Walk. If Grail would come back with him, so much the better.

Walter was left to refresh himself after his journey. He changed his clothes, and presently sat down to a meal. But appetite by this time failed him. He had the table cleared ten minutes after it was laid.

He was in the utmost uneasiness. Could it be Grail who had called? He tried to assure himself that it must be a mistake. How could Grail expect him to be in town, after reading that letter from Jersey? If indeed the visitor were Gilbert, some catastrophe had befallen. But he would not entertain such a fear. Then the second caller; that might be any acquaintance. Still, it was strange that he too had refused his name.

You know the state of mind in which, whatever one thinks of, a pain, a fear, draws the thought another way. It was so with Egremont. The two mysterious callers and the annoying scene at the railway station plagued him successively, and for background to them all was a shadow of indefinite apprehension.

He could scarcely endure his impatience. It seemed as though the messenger would never return. The lad presented himself, however, without undue delay. He had found Mr. Grail, he said, at the second address.

'And who did you see in Brook Street?'

'A woman, sir; she said Mr. Grail didn't live there.'

'He couldn't come with you?'

'No, sir. But he said he'd come very soon.'

'Thank you. That will do.'

So Grail was *not* at the library. Then of a certainty something had happened. Thyrza was ill; perhaps——

He walked about the room. That dread physical pain which clutches at all the inner parts when one is waiting in agonised impatience for that which will be misery when it comes, racked him so that at moments he had to lean for support. He felt how the suffering of the last fortnight, in vain fled from hither and thither, had reduced his strength. Since he took leave of Thryza, he had not known one moment of calm. When passion was merciful for a time, fear had taken its turn to torment him. It had not availed to demonstrate to himself that fear *must* be groundless. Love from of old has had a comrade superstition; if he awoke from a wretched dream, he interpreted it as sympathy with Thyrza in some dreadful trial. And behold! he had been right. His flight had profited nothing; woe had come upon her he loved, and upon the man he most desired to befriend.

Half an hour after the return of the messenger, the servant came to the door and said that 'Mr. Grail' was below.

'Yes. I'll see him.'

He spoke the words with difficulty. He advanced to the middle of the room. Gilbert came in, and the door was closed behind him.

The man looked as if he had risen from his death-bed to obey this summons. The flesh of his face had shrunk, and left the lines of his countenance sharp. His eye-sockets were cavernous; the dark eyes had an unnatural lustre. His hair and beard were abandoned to neglect. His garments hung with strange looseness about him. He stood there, just within the door, his gaze fixed on Egremont, a gaze wherein suspicion and reproach and all unutterable woe were blended.

Walter took a step forward, vainly holding out his hand.

'Grail, what has happened? You are ill. What does it mean?'

'Why have you sent for me, Mr. Egremont?'

The question was uttered with some sternness, but bodily weakness subdued the voice, which shook. And when he had spoken, his eyes fell.

'Because I want to know what is the matter,' Egremont replied, in quick, unnerved tones. 'Have you been here to try and see me?'

'Yes, I have.'

'Why? you knew I was away. What has happened, Grail?'

'I thought you knew, Mr. Egremont.'

'How should I know? I have heard nothing from London for a fortnight. You speak to me in an unfriendly way. Tell me at once what you mean.'

Gilbert looked up for a moment, looked indignantly, bitterly. But his eyes drooped again as he spoke.

'A fortnight ago Miss Trent left her home, and we can hear nothing of her. I tried to find you, because I had reason to think that you knew where she was.'

Walter felt it as a relief. He had waited for something worse. Only after-thought could occupy itself with the charge distinctly made against him. He said, as soon as he could command his voice:

'You were wrong in thinking so. I know nothing of Miss Trent. I have no idea where she can have gone.'

It was only when he found Grail's eyes fixed upon him that he added, after a pause:

'What were the reasons that led you to think so?'

'You know nothing?' Gilbert said, slowly.

'Nothing whatever. How could you think I did? I don't understand you.'

Walter was not used to speak untruthfully. He knew all this time that a man upon whom a charge such as this had come as a sheer surprise would have met it with quite other face and accent. Remembering all that had passed between Thyrza and himself, remembering all that he had undergone, all that he had

at one moment proposed, he could not express the astonishment which would have given evidence on his behalf. As yet he had not even tried to affect indignation, for it was against his nature to play the hypocrite. He knew that his manner was all but a tacit admission that appearances were against him. But agitation drove him to the brink of anger, and when Gilbert stood mute, with veiled eyes, he continued impetuously :

'I tell you that you have amazed me by your news. Are you accusing me of something ? You must speak more plainly. Do you mean that suspicion has fallen upon me ? How ? I don't—I can't understand you ! '

'I thought you would understand me,' Gilbert replied, gravely, not offensively, with far more dignity than the other had been able to preserve. 'Several things compelled me to believe that you knew of her leaving us. I was told of your meetings with her at the library.'

He paused. Like Egremont, he could not speak his whole thought. Whilst there remained a possibility that Egremont indeed knew nothing of Thyrza's disappearance, he might not strengthen his case by making use of the girl's confession to her sister. He could only make use of outward circumstances.

'The meetings at the library ? ' Egremont repeated. 'But do you think they had any meaning that I can't at once and freely explain to you ? It was the idlest folly on my part. I had a plan that I would get books on to the shelves that week, and at the end of it

take you there and surprise you. Didn't I imply that in my letter to you from Jersey? It was childish, of course. On the Monday, Miss Trent surprised me at work. She had happened to see a box being brought in, and naturally came to see what was going on. I was unthinking enough to ask her to keep the secret. By allowing her to help me, I encouraged her to come again the next day. So much was wholly my fault, but surely not a very grave one. Do you imagine, Grail, that anything passed between us on those two mornings which you might not have heard? How is it possible for you, for *you*, to pass from the fact of that foolish secret to such suspicions as these?'

In the pause Gilbert offered no word.

'And who told you about it? Evidently someone bent on mischief.'

Again a pause. Gilbert stood unmoving.

'You still suspect me? You think I am lying to you? Do you know me no better than that?'

It rang false, it rang false. His own voice sounded to him as that of an actor, who does his poor best to be forcible and pathetic. Yet what lie had he told? Could he say all he thought he had read in Thyrza's eyes? There was the parting that night beyond Lambeth Bridge; how could he speak of that? Was he himself not absolutely innocent? Had he not by a desperate struggle avoided as much as a glance of tenderness at the girl for whom he was mad with love?

Gilbert spoke at length.

'I find it very hard to believe that you know nothing more. There are other things. As soon as we knew that she was gone, that Friday night, I came here to ask for you.'

'And why? Why to me?'

'Because she had been seen with you at the library, and people had begun to talk. They told me you were gone, and I asked for your address. They wouldn't give it me.'

'That meant nothing whatever. It was merely my landlady's idea of her responsibility to me.'

'Yes, that may be. On Saturday night a letter came from you, from Jersey.'

'Well? Was that the kind of letter I could have written if I had been such a traitor to you?'

'I don't know what the letter would have seemed to me if I had been able to judge it with my ordinary mind. I couldn't: I was going through too much. I believed it false. On Monday I went to Southampton, and from there at night to Jersey; it was the earliest that I could get there.'

'You went to Jersey?'

'I had no choice. I had to see you. And I found you had gone away on Saturday morning, gone to France. It was only Saturday night that I got your letter. There was no word in it about going to France: instead of that, you said plainly that you would be in Jersey for a week or more.'

'It is true. I see how I have made evidence against myself.'

He said it with impatience, but at once added in a steadier voice :

'I wrote the letter and posted it on Friday night, when I had only been at St. Aubin's half a day. The very next morning I was compelled by restlessness to give up my idea of remaining there. When I wrote to you I had no thought of leaving the island.'

How pleasant it was to be able to speak with unshadowed veracity! Walter all but smiled, and, when the other made no reply, he went on in a voice almost of pleading :

'You believe this? Is your mind so set against me that you will accuse me of any cowardice rather than credit my word?'

A change came over Gilbert's face. It was wrung with pain, and as he looked up it seemed to cost him a horrible effort to speak.

'If,' he said, 'in a moment of temptation you did her the greatest wrong that a man can do to a woman, you would perhaps say and do anything rather than confess it.'

Walter tried to meet those eyes steadily, but failed. He broke forth into passionate self-defence.

'That means you think the worst of me that one man can think of another. You are wrong! You are basely wrong! You speak of a moment of temptation. Suppose me to have suffered that; what sort of temptation do you suppose would have assailed me? A man is tempted according to his fibre. Do you class me

with those who can only be tempted by base suggestions? What reason have I ever given you to think of me so? Suppose me to have been tempted. You conclude that I must have aimed at stealing the girl from you solely to gratify myself, heedless of her, heedless of you. Such a motive as that is to outweigh every higher instinct I possess, to blind me to past and future, to make me all at once a heartless, unimaginative brute. That is your view of my character, Grail!'

Gilbert had not the appearance of a man who listens. Since entering the room, he had not moved from the spot where he stood, and now, with his head again drooping, he seemed sunk in a reverie of the profoundest sadness. But he heard, and he strove to believe. A fortnight ago he would not have thought it possible for Walter Egremont to speak a word of which the sincerity would seem doubtful. Since then he had spent days and nights such as sap the foundations of a man's moral being and shake convictions which appeared impregnable. The catastrophe which had come upon him was proportionate in its effects to the immeasurable happiness which preceded it. Remember that it was not only the imaginary wrong from which his mind suffered; the fact that Thyrza loved Egremont was in itself an agony almost enough to threaten his reason. His love was not demonstrative; perhaps he did not himself know all its force until jealousy taught him. How, think you, did he spend that night on the Channel, voyaging from Southampton

to Jersey? What sort of companions were the winds and waves as he paced the deck in the dim light before dawn, straining his eyes for the first sight of land? To the end of all things that night would remain with him, a ghastly memory. And since then he had not known one full hour of forgetfulness. The days and the nights had succeeded each other as in a torture-chamber. His body had wasted; his mind ever renewed its capability of anguish. With all appearances against Egremont, could he preserve the nice balance of his judgment through an experience such as this?

Had he seen Egremont at once, after Thyrza's disappearance, it would not have been so hard for him to credit the denial. The blow was not felt to its full until the night had passed. Thyrza's exculpation of Egremont would then have been strong upon the latter's side. But the fruitless journey frenzied him. It was impossible for him to avoid the belief that the letter had been contrived to deceive him. All the suspicions he had entertained grew darker as his suffering increased. His meeting with Egremont at the end of Newport Street on the Wednesday night seemed to him beyond doubt condemnatory. He remembered the young man's haste and obvious agitation. Then Thyrza's words ceased to have weight; he thought them due to her desire to avert suspicion from her lover. And now that he was at length face to face with the man whom in his lonely woe he had cursed as the falsest friend, his ear was keen to detect every note of treachery, his

eyes read Egremont's countenance with preternatural keenness. Walter could not sustain such proof; his agitation spoke against him. Only when he at length passed from uncertain argument and pleading to scornful repudiation of the charge, did his utterances awake in the hearer the old associations of sincerity and nobleness. How many a night Gilbert had hung on every word that fell from him! Could he speak thus and be no more than a contemptible hypocrite?

Walter paused for a few moments. When no reply came, he continued with the same warmth:

'I have told you that, on those two mornings, when she was with me in the library, no word passed between us that you might not have heard. It is true. But one thing I did say to her which doubtless would not have been said in your presence. She was speaking to me as if to a superior; I begged her to let there be an end of that, and to allow me to call myself her friend. I meant it in the purest sense, and in that sense she understood it. If I was wrong in taking that freedom with her, at least there was no thought of wrong in my mind.'

'You met her on Wednesday night in that week,' Gilbert said, speaking with uncertain voice. 'The night that you saw me and said you had been to Bunce.'

'Do you know of that from some spy, her enemy and mine—or how?'

'I know it. I can't tell you how.'

'Yes, I met her that night. Not by appointment, as you suppose. It was by mere chance, as I came away from Bunce's house. I told her I was leaving town next day, and I said good-bye to her. Again, not a syllable was uttered that anyone might not have heard.'

'Were you coming away from her, then, when I saw you?' Gilbert asked, in a hard voice.

'No, not straight from her.'

As is wont to be the case with us when we have recourse to equivocation, Egremont thought that he read in his rival's countenance a scornful surmise of the truth. As is also wont to happen, this sense of detection heated his blood, and for a moment he could have found pleasure in flinging out an angry defiance. But as he looked Grail in the face, the latter's eyes fell, and something, some slight movement of feature, touching once more Walter's sense of compassion, shamed him from unworthy utterance. He said, in a lower voice:

'If I *had* yielded to temptation, if I had so far lost control of myself as to speak a word to her which at once and for ever altered our relations, do you think I should have tried to keep secret what had happened? Do you think I could have conceived a desire which had *her* suffering for its end? Are you so embittered that you can imagine of me nothing better than that? You think I could have made *her* my victim?'

Grail read his face. The emphasis of this speech

was deliberate, could not be misunderstood. For the first time Gilbert turned and moved a little apart.

Walter had not the exclusive privilege of being an idealist. When at length he spoke out of his deepest feeling, when he revealed, though but indirectly, the meaning of his agitation, of his evasions and doubtful behaviour, he had found the way of convincing his hearer. It was a new blow to Gilbert, but it put an end to his darkest fears and to the misery of his misjudgment. In the silence that followed all the details of the story passed before him with a new significance. The greatness of his own love—a love which drew into its service every noblest element of his nature, enabled him, once the obscuring mists dispelled, to interpret his rival's mind with justice. Regarding Egremont again, he could read aright the signs of suffering that were on his face. It was with a strange bitter joy that he recovered his faith in the man who had been so much to him. Yet his first words seemed to express more of passionate resentment than any he had yet spoken.

'Then you acted wrongly!' he exclaimed, in a firm, clear voice. 'You were wrong in allowing her to stay and help you in the library. You were wrong in speaking to her as you did, in asking her to address you as an equal, and to let you be her friend. You must have known then what your real meaning was. It is only half a truth that you said and did nothing to disturb her mind. You were not honest with your-

self, and you had no just regard for me. You *did* yield to temptation, and all you have said in defence of yourself has only been true in sound.'

'No! You go too far, Grail. You accused me of baseness, and I have never had a base thought.'

Then came a long silence. Gilbert stood motionless, Egremont walked slowly from place to place. The point at issue between the two men was changed; anger and suspicion were at an end, but so was all hope of restoring the old union.

Then Egremont said:

'You must tell me one thing plainly. Do you still doubt my word when I say that I knew nothing of her flight from you, and know nothing of where she now is?'

'I believe you,' was answered, simply.

'And more than that. Do you think me capable of wronging her and you in the way you suspected?'

'I was wrong. I was unjust to you.'

Grail could suffer jealousy, but was incapable of malice. The stab of the revelation that had been made might go through and through his heart, but the wound would breed no evil humours. He made his admission with the relief which comes of recovered self-respect.

'Thank you for that, Grail,' Walter replied, moved as a gentle nature always is by magnanimity.

After another pause, he said:

'May I ask you anything more about her? Had she money? Could she have gone far?'

'At most she had a few pence.'

'Did she leave no written word?'

'Yes. She wrote something for her sister.'

Walter hesitated. Grail, after a struggle with himself, repeated the substance of Thyrza's note.

A few more words were interchanged, then Gilbert said:

'I will leave you now, Mr. Egremont.'

Walter dreaded this parting. Could he let Grail go from him and say no word about the library? Yet what was to be said? Everything was hopelessly at an end; the hint of favour from him to the other was henceforth insult. Gilbert was moving towards him, but he could not look up. Forcing himself to speak:

'If you find her—if you hear anything—will you tell me? I mean only, will you let me know the fact that you have news?'

'Yes, I will.'

At length their eyes met. Then Grail held out his hand, and Egremont clasped it firmly.

'This is not the end between us,' he said, huskily. 'You must wish that you had never seen me, but I can never lose the hope that we may some day be friends again.'

The haggard man went his way in silence. Egremont, throwing himself upon a seat in utter weariness, felt more alone than ever yet in his life. . . .

Who or what was left to him now? A little while ago, when he had felt that his connection with the world of wealth and refinement was practically at an end, it seemed more than a substitute to look forward to intimacy with that one household in Lambeth, and to associations that would arise thence. He believed that it would henceforth content him to have friends in the sphere to which he belonged by birth, and, for the needs of his mind, to find companionship among his books. He saw before him a career of practical usefulness such as only a man in his peculiar position could pursue with unwavering zeal. What now was to become of his future? Where were his friends?

Grail had said that in Lambeth people were gossiping evil of him. Such gossip, he understood too well, would have its lasting effect. No contradiction could avail against it. Even if Thyrza returned, it would be impossible for her to resume her life in the old places; the truth could never be so spread as to counteract the harm already done. Lambeth had lost its free library. How long would it wait before another man was found able and willing to do so much on its behalf?

Looking in the other direction, he could now explain that scene at Charing Cross. Dalmaine, through his connection with Lambeth, had already heard the story. He took this way of showing that he was informed of everything, and of manifesting his august

disapproval. It needed only a word of admonition to Paula, and she at once recognised how improper it would be to hold further relations with so unprincipled a man. So they turned away, and, in the vulgar phrase, 'cut' him.

The Dalmaines knowing, of course their relatives and their friends knew. The Tyrrells would by this time have discussed the whole shocking affair, doubtless with the decision that they could no longer be 'at home' to Mr. Egremont.

And if the Tyrrells—then Annabel Newthorpe.

Would Annabel give faith to such a charge against him? Perhaps such evidence would be adduced to her that she could have no choice but to judge and condemn him. Gilbert Grail had thought him infamous; perhaps Annabel would hesitate as little. She would have remarked a strangeness in his manner to her, explicable now. Believing, how she must scorn him! How those beautiful eyes of hers would speak in one glance of cold contempt, if ever he passed beneath them! She *might* take the nobler part; she *might* hold it incredible till she had a confession from his very lips. But were women magnanimous? And Annabel, very clear in thought, very pure in soul—was she after all so far above her sisters as to face all hazard of human weakness in defence of an ideal?

Annabel, now in London, would write the news to Mrs. Ormonde. Would it receive credence from her—

his dearest friend? Assuredly not, if she had known nothing to give the calumny startling support. But there was that letter he wrote to her about Thyrza; there was her recollection of the interview in Great Russell Street, when it might be that he had betrayed himself. She had found him in a state of perturbation which he could not conceal; it was on the eve of his own departure from London—of Thyrza's disappearance. Well, she too must form her own judgment. If she wrote to him and asked plainly for information, he would know how to reply. Till she wrote, he must keep silence.

So there was the bead-roll of his friends. No, he had omitted Annabel's father. Mr. Newthorpe was a student, and apt to be humorously cynical in his judgment of men. To him the story would not appear incredible. Youth, human nature, a passionate temperament; these explain so much to the unprejudiced mind. Mr. Newthorpe must go with the rest.

For other acquaintances he cared nothing.

So his fate at last had declared itself. Even though the all but impossible should befall, and Grail should still marry Thyrza, how could the schemes for common activity survive this shock? Say what he might, he had no longer even the desire to work personally for the old aims. How hard to believe that he was the same man who had lectured to that little band of hearers on English Literature, who had uttered with such vehemence the 'Thoughts

for the Present'! That period of his life was gone by like smoke; the heart in which such enthusiasms were nourished had been swept by an all-consuming fire. Henceforth he must live for himself, the vainest of all lives. To such a one the world was a sorry place. He had no mind to taste such pleasures as it offered to a rich man with no ideal save physical enjoyment; he no longer cared to search out its beautiful things, to probe its mysteries. To what end, since all pleasure and all knowledge must end in himself? . . .

Where at this moment was Thyrza? The thought had mingled with all those others. Did she then love him so much that marriage with Grail had become impossible—that she would rather face every hardship and peril of a hidden life in some dark corner of London? For she lived; proof of it seemed to be in the refusal of his mind to contemplate a fatal issue of her trial. She lived, and held him in her heart—the strong, passionate heart, source of music and of love. And he—could he foresee the day when he should no longer love her?

But of that she knew nothing, and must never know of it. The one outlook for his life lay yonder, where love was beckoning; grant him leave to follow, and what limitless prospect opened in place of the barren hills which now enclosed him. But follow he must not. In that respect nothing was altered. When

he thought of Thyrza, it must still be with the hope that she would return and fulfil her promise to Gilbert Grail.

At a late hour he went to his bedroom. He lay down with a weary brain, and, in trying to ask himself what he should do on the morrow, fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND.

Mrs. Ormonde waited anxiously for Annabel's first letter from London. Neither of them had spoken of Egremont after Annabel's visit with the news from Paula. The girl gave no sign of trouble; she appeared to continue her preparations with the same enjoyment as before. It was doubtful whether, in writing, she would make any reference to Egremont, but Mrs. Ormonde hoped there would be some word.

The letter came five days after Annabel's arrival in London, and was short. It mentioned visits to the Academy and the Grosvenor, made a few comments, spoke of this and that old acquaintance reseen; then came a concluding paragraph:

'Father called at Mr. Egremont's two days ago, but did not see him. He learnt that Mr. Egremont had been at home for one day, but was gone out of town again. My aunt, as I gather from a chance word, takes the least charitable view; I fear that was to be expected. We, however, *know* the truth—do we not? It is sad, but not shameful. I have no means of hearing any-

thing about the library. I believe father has been to Lambeth, but he and I do not speak on the subject. Paula, for some reason, avoids me.'

It was one of several letters that arrived that morning. After opening two appeals from charitable institutions, Mrs. Ormonde found an envelope which, from the handwriting upon it, she judged to be a similar communication from a private source. The address was laboriously scrawled, and ill-spelt; the postage stamp was badly affixed; there were finger-marks on the back. Such envelopes generally came from the parents of children who had been in the Home, and frequently—dirtiness announced such cases—made appeal for temporary assistance. The present missive, however, was misleading; its contents proved to be these:

'Madam,—We have a young girl with us as lies very bad. She come to us not more than three week ago and asked for ployment, and me and my husband wasn't unwilling for to give her a chance, seeing she looked respectable, though we thought it wasn't unlikely as there might be something wrong, because of her looks and her clothing, which wasn't neither of them like the girl out of work, and then it's true she couldn't give no reference. And now she's had fainting fits, and lies very bad, having broke two dishes with falling, and which of course she couldn't help, and we don't say as she could. My husband told me as I ought for to look in her pocket, and which I did, and there I found a

envelope as had wrote your name and address on it. So I take the liberty of writing, and which I am not much of a scholar, because she do lie very bad, and if so be she has friends, they had ought to know. I do what I can for her, but I have the customers to tend to, because we keep a coffee-shop, which you'll find it at Number seventeen, Bank Street, off the Caledonian Road. And I beg to end. From yours obedient,

'SARAH GANDLE.'

There could be little doubt who this young girl was. Bad spelling and worse writing rendered the letter very difficult to translate into English, but from the first sentence Mrs. Ormonde thought of Thyrza Trent. The description would apply to Thyrza, and Thyrza might by some chance have kept in her pocket the address which, as Mrs. Ormonde knew, Bunce had given her when she brought Bessie to Eastbourne.

Her first emotion was of joy. This was quickly succeeded by doubts and fears in plenty, for it was difficult to explain Thyrza's taking such a step as this letter suggested. But the course to be pursued was clear. She took the first train to London.

Caledonian Road is a great channel of traffic running directly north from King's Cross to Holloway. It is doubtful whether London can show any thoroughfare of importance more offensive to eye and ear and nostril. You stand at the entrance to it, and gaze into a region of supremest ugliness; every house front is marked

with meanness and inveterate grime ; every shop seems breaking forth with mould or dry-rot ; the people who walk here appear one and all to be employed in labour that soils body and spirit. Journey on the top of a tram-car from King's Cross to Holloway, and civilisation has taught you its ultimate achievement in ignoble hideousness. You look off into narrow side-channels where unconscious degradation has made its inexpugnable home, and sits veiled with refuse. You pass above lines of railway, which cleave the region with black-breathing fissure. You see the pavements half occupied with the paltriest and most sordid wares ; the sign of the pawnbroker is on every hand ; the public-houses look and reek more intolerably than in other places. The population is dense, the poverty is undisguised. All this northward-bearing tract, between Camden Town on the one hand and Islington on the other, is the valley of the shadow of vilest servitude. Its public monument is a cyclopean prison ; save for the desert around the Great Northern Goods Depôt, its only open ground is a malodorous cattle-market. In comparison, Lambeth is picturesque and venerable, St. Giles's is romantic, Hoxton is clean and suggestive of domesticity, Whitechapel is full of poetry, Limehouse is sweet with sea-breathings.

Hither Mrs. Ormonde drove from Victoria Station. The neighbourhood was unknown to her save by name. On entering the Caledonian Road, her cabman had to make inquiries for Bank Street, which he at length

found not far from the prison. He drew up before a small coffee-shop, on the window whereof was pasted this advertisement: 'Dine here! Best quality. Largest quantity. Lowest price.' Over the door was the name 'Gandle.'

Mrs. Ormonde bade the driver wait, and entered. It was the dinner-hour of this part of the world. Every available place was occupied by men, some in their shirt-sleeves, who were doing ample justice to the fare set before them by Mrs. Gandle and her daughter. Beyond the space assigned to the public was a partition of wood, four feet high, with a door in the middle; this concealed the kitchen, whence came clouds of steam, and the sound of frying, and odours manifold. At the entrance of a lady—a lady without qualification—such of the feeders as happened to look from their plates stared in wonderment. It was an embarrassing position. Mrs. Ormonde walked quickly down the narrow gangway, and to the door in the partition. A young woman was just coming forth, with steaming plates on a tray.

'Can I see Mrs. Gandle?' the visitor asked.

The girl cried out: 'Mother, you're wanted!' and pushed past, with grins bestowed on either side.

Above the partition appeared a face like a harvest moon.

'I have come in reply to your letter,' Mrs. Ormonde said, 'the letter about the girl who is ill.'

'Oh, you've come, have you, mum!' was the reply,

in a voice at once respectful and surprised. 'Would you be so good as step inside, mum? Please push the door.'

Mrs. Ormonde was relieved to pass into the privacy of the kitchen. It was a room of some ten feet square insufferably hot, very dirty, a factory for the production of human fodder. On a side table stood a great red dripping mass, whence Mrs. Gandle severed portions to be supplied as roast beef. Vessels on the range held green substance which was called cabbage, and yellow lumps doled forth as potatoes. Before the fire, bacon and sausages were frizzling; above it was spluttering a beef-steak. On a sink in one corner were piled eating utensils which awaited the wipe of a very loathsome rag hanging hard by. Other objects lay about in indescribable confusion.

Mrs. Gandle was a very stout woman, with bare arms. She perspired freely, and was not a little disconcerted by the appearance of her visitor. Her moon-face had a simple and not disagreeable look.

'You won't mind me a-getting on with my work the whiles I talk, mum?' she said. 'The men's tied to time, most of 'em, and I've often lost a customer by keepin' him waitin'. They're not too sweet-tempered in these parts. I was born and bred in Peckham myself, and only come here when I married my second husband, which he's a plumber by trade. I can't so much as ask you for to sit down, mum. You see, we have to 'conomize room, as my husband says. But I can

talk and work, both; only I've got to keep one ear open——'

A shrill voice cried from the shop:

'Two beefs, 'taters an' greens! One steak-pie, 'taters! Two cups o' tea!'

'Right!' cried Mrs. Gandle, and proceeded to execute the orders.

'What is this poor girl's name?' Mrs. Ormonde asked. 'You didn't mention it.'

'Well, mum, she calls herself Mary Wood. Do you know anyone o' that name?'

'I think not.'

'Now come along, 'Lizabeth!' screamed the woman of a sudden, at the top of her voice. 'Don't stand a-talkin' there! Two beefs, 'taters and greens.'

'That's right, Mrs. Gandle!' roared some man. 'You give it her. It's the usial Bow-bells with her 'an Sandy Dick 'ere!'

There was laughter, and 'Lizabeth came running for her orders. Mrs. Gandle, with endless interruptions, proceeded thus:

'Between you and me, mum, I don't believe as that *is* her name. But she give it at first, and she's stuck to it. No, I don't think she's worse to-day, though she talked a lot in the night. Yes, we've had a doctor. She wouldn't have me send for nobody, and said as there was nothing ailed her, but then it come as she couldn't stand on her feet. She's a littlish girl, may be seventeen or eighteen, with yellow-like hair.

I haven't knowed well what to do; I thought I'd ought to send her to the 'orspital, but then I found the henvelope in her pocket, an' we thought we'd just wait a day to see if anybody answered us. And I didn't like to act heartless with her, neither; she's a motherless thing, so she says, an' only wants for to earn her keep and her sleep; an' I don't think there's no harm in her, s'far as I can see. She come into the shop last night was three weeks, just after eleven o'clock, and she says, "If you please, mum," she says, speakin' very nice, "can you give me a bed for sevenpence?" "Why, I don't know about that," says I, "I haven't a bedroom as I let usial under a shilling." Then she was for goin' straight away, without another word. And she was so quiet like, it took me as I couldn't send her off without asking her something about herself. And she said she hadn't got no 'ome in London, and only sevenpence in her pocket, and as how she wanted to find work. And she must have walked about a deal, she looked that dead beat.

'Well, I just went in an' spoke a word to Mr. Gandle. It's true as we wanted someone to help me an' 'Lizabeth; we've wanted someone bad for a long time. And this young girl wouldn't be amiss, we thought, for waitin' in the shop; the men likes to see a noo face, you know, mum, an' all the more if it's a good-lookin' un. If she'd been a orn'ary lookin' girl, of course I couldn't have not so much as thought of it, as things was. She told me plain an' straightforward as she

couldn't say who she was and where she came from. And it was something in her way o' speakin', a kind o' quietness like, as you don't hoften get in young girls nowadays. They're so for'ard, as their parents ain't got the same 'old on 'em as they had when I was young. I shouldn't wonder if you've noticed the same thing with your servants, mum. An' so I said as I'd let her have a bed for sevenpence; and if you'd a' seen how thankful she looked. She wasn't the kind to go an' sleep anywhere, an' goodness only knows what might a' come to her at that hour o' the night. And the next mornin' she did look that white an' poorly, when I met her a-comin' down the stairs. "Well," says I, "an' what about breakfast, eh?" She went a bit red like, an' said as it didn't matter; she'd go out an' find work. "Well, look here now," says I, "suppose you wash up them things there to pay for a cup o' tea and two slices?" An' then she looked at me thankful again, an' says as it was kind o' me. Well, of course, you may say as it isn't everybody 'ud a' took her in for sevenpence, but then, as I was a-sayin', we did want somebody to help me an' 'Lizabeth, an' I don't take much to myself for what I did.'

'You acted well and kindly, Mrs. Gandle,' said Mrs. Ormonde.

So the long story went on. The girl had been only too glad to stay as general servant, and worked well, worked as hard as anyone could expect, Mrs. Gandle said. But she was far from well, and every day, after

the first week, her strength fell off. At length she had a fainting fit, falling with two dishes in her hands. Her work had to be lightened. But the fainting was several times repeated, and, now three days ago, illness it was impossible to struggle against kept her to her bed.

'Well, I begged an' I prayed of her as she'd tell me where she belonged, and where her friends was. But she could only cry an' say as she'd go away, and wouldn't be a burden. "Don't talk silly, child," I kep' sayin'. "How can you go away in this state? Unless you're goin' to your friends?" But she said no, as she hadn't no friends to go to. An' she cried so, it fair went to my heart, the poor thing! An' I begun to be that afraid as she'd die. I am that glad as you've come, mum. If you don't mind waitin' another ten minutes, the worst o' this 'll be over, an' then I can leave 'Lizabeth to it, and go upstairs with you.'

'Is she conscious at present?'

'She was, a little while ago. It is the nights is worst, of course. Last night she talked an' talked; it's easy to see she has some trouble on her mind. I haven't got nobody as can sit with her when we have the shop full. But I was with her up to three o'clock this morning; then 'Lizabeth took my place till the shop was opened for the early corfee. I don't think she's no worse, and the doctor he don't think so. He's a clever man, I believe; at all events he has that name, as I may say, and he lives just round here in Winter

Street, a house with green-painted railing, and "'Spensary" wrote up on the window.'

'Will he call again to-day?'

'I don't suppose as he *would*, but he's sure to be at 'ome in an hour, and, if you'd like, mum, I'd just send 'Lizabeth round.'

'Thank you; I think I'll go and see him.'

At last the burden of the dinner-hour was over, and 'Lizabeth could be left alone for a little. Mrs. Gandle washed her hands, in a rather perfunctory way, and guided her visitor to a dark flight of stairs. They ascended. On the top floor the woman stopped and whispered:

'That's the room. Should I just look in first, mum?'

'Please.'

Mrs. Gandle entered and came forth again.

'She seems to me to be asleep, mum. She lays very still, and her eyes is shut.'

'I'll go in. I shall sit with her for an hour and then go to see the doctor.'

Mrs. Ormonde passed in. It was a mean little room, not as tidy as it might have been, and far from as clean. There on the low pillow was a pale face, with golden hair disordered about the brow; a face so wasted that it was not easy in the first moment to identify it with that which had been so wonderful in its spell-bound beauty by the sea-shore. But it was Thyrza.

Her eyes were only half closed, and it was not a

natural sleep that held her. Mrs. Ormonde examined her for several moments, then just touched her forehead. Thyrza stirred and muttered something, but gave no sign of consciousness.

The hour went by very slowly. The traffic in the street was incessant and noisy; two men, who were selling coals from a cart, for a long time vied with each other in the utterance of roars drawn out in afflicting cadence. Mrs. Ormonde now sat by the bed, regarding Thyrza, now went to the window and looked at the grimy houses opposite. The prescribed interval had almost elapsed, when Thyrza suddenly raised herself and said with distinctness:

'You promised me, Lyddy; you know you promised!'

Mrs. Ormonde was standing at the foot of the bed. She drew nearer, and, as the sick girl regarded her, asked:

'Do you know me, Thyrza?'

Thyrza fell back, fear-stricken. She spoke a few disconnected words, then her eyes half-closed again, and the lethargy returned upon her.

In a few minutes Mrs. Ormonde left the room and sought her acquaintance in the cooking department. Mrs. Gandle gave her the exact address of the medical man, and she found the house without difficulty.

She had to wait for a quarter of an hour in a bare, dusty, drug-smelling ante-chamber, where also sat a woman who coughed without ceasing, and a boy who

had a formidable bandage athwart his face. The practitioner, when he presented himself, failed to inspire her with confidence. He expressed himself so ambiguously about Thyrza's condition and gave on the whole such scanty proof of intelligence that Mrs. Ormonde felt it unsafe to leave him in charge of a case such as this. She easily obtained his permission to summon a doctor with whom she was acquainted.

She drove to the latter's abode, and was fortunate enough to find him at luncheon. She was on terms of intimacy with the family, and accepted very willingly an invitation to join them at their meal. But the doctor could not get to Caledonian Road before the evening. Having made an appointment with him for seven o'clock, she next drove to the east side of Regent's Park, where, in a quiet street of lodging-houses, she knocked at a door and made inquiries for Mrs. Emerson. This lady was at home, the servant said. Mrs. Ormonde went up the first floor and entered a sitting-room.

Its one occupant was a young woman, probably of six-and-twenty, who sat in out-of-doors attire. Her look suggested that she had come home too weary even to take her bonnet off before resting. She had the air of an educated person ; her dress, which was plain and decent in the same rather depressing way as the appointment of her room, put it beyond doubt that she spent her days in some one of the manifold kinds of teaching; a roll upon her lap plainly consisted of music. She could not lay claim to good looks, save

in the sense that her features were impressed with agreeable womanliness; the smile which followed speedily upon her expression of surprise when Mrs. Ormonde appeared, was natural, homely and sweet. She threw the roll away, and sprang up with a joyous exclamation:

'To think that you should come just on this day and at this time, Mrs. Ormonde! It's just by a chance that I'm at home. I've only this moment come back from Notting Hill, where I found a pupil too unwell to have her lesson. And in half an hour I have to go to St. John's Wood. Just by a chance that I'm here. How vexed I should have been if I'd heard of you coming whilst I was away! *Isn't* it annoying for people to call whilst one's away? I mean, of course, people one really wants to see.'

'Certainly, things don't often happen so well. I'm in town on very doleful business, and have come to see if you can help me.'

'Help you? How? I do hope I can.'

'Have you still your spare room?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Then I may perhaps ask you to let me have it in a few days. I must tell you how it is. A poor girl, in whom I have a great interest, has fallen ill in very dreary lodgings. I don't think it would be possible to move her at present; I don't in fact yet know the nature of her illness exactly, and, of course, if it's anything to be afraid of, I shouldn't bring her. But that

is scarcely likely; I fancy she will want only careful nursing. Dr. Lambe is going to see her this evening, and he's just promised me to send a nurse from some institution where he has to call. If we can safely move her presently, may I bring her here?'

'Of course you may, Mrs. Ormonde! I'll get everything ready to-night. Will you come up and tell me of anything you'd like me to do?'

'Not now. You look tired, and must rest before you go out again. I'll come and see you again to-morrow.'

'To-morrow? Let me see; I shall be here at twelve, but only for a few minutes; then I shan't be home again till half-past nine. Could you come after then, Mrs. Ormonde?'

'Yes. But what a long day that is! I hope you're not often so late?'

'Oh, I don't mind it a bit,' said the other, cheerfully. 'It's a pupil at Sevenoaks, piano and singing. Indeed I'm very glad. The more the better. They keep me out of mischief.'

Mrs. Ormonde smiled moderately in reply to the laugh with which Mrs. Emerson completed her jest.

'How is your husband?'

'Still far from well. I'm so sorry he isn't in now. I think he's—no, I'm not quite sure where he is; he had to go somewhere on business.'

'He is able to get to business again?' Mrs. Ormonde asked, without looking at the other.

'Not to his regular business. Oh no, that wouldn't be safe yet. He begins to look better, but he's very weak still. His appearance is so deceptive, you know, Mrs. Ormonde. Still, he does a great deal.'

She interrupted herself, and smiled in an embarrassed way.

'A great deal?' Mrs. Ormonde repeated, without concealing her curiosity.

'I mustn't say what it is,' was the reply, the speaker still smiling in a sort of pleased confusion. 'If I told anybody, it would be you; but indeed I mustn't say, Mrs. Ormonde. If you come to-morrow night, of course he'll be here. He will be so glad to see you. And he *has* suffered so! It must be very hard for a man of his age to be compelled to guard against all sorts of little things that other people think nothing of, mustn't it?'

'Yes, it must be trying,' Mrs. Ormonde replied, quietly.

'And I can't think there's another man in the world who would bear it so uncomplainingly. But you know,' she added, laughing again, 'that I'm very proud of my husband. I always make you smile at me, Mrs. Ormonde. But now, I am so very—very sorry, but I'm obliged to go. I manage to catch a 'bus just at the top of the street; if I missed it, I should be half an hour late, and these are very particular people. Oh, I've such a laughable story to tell you about them, but it must wait till to-morrow. Harold says I tell

it so well; he's sure I could write a novel if I tried. I think I will try some day; I believe people make a great deal of money out of novels, don't they, Mrs. Ormonde?'

'I have heard of one or two who tried to, but didn't.'

'I do hope the poor girl will soon be well enough to come. I'll get the room thoroughly in order to-night.'

They left the house together. Mrs. Emerson ran in the direction of the omnibus she wished to catch; the other shortly found a vehicle, and drove back again to Bank Street, Caledonian Road.

Thyrza still lay in the same condition. In a little more than half an hour came the trained nurse of Dr. Lambe's sending, and forthwith the sick-room was got into a more tolerable condition, Mrs. Ormonde procuring whatever the nurse desired. Much private talk passed downstairs between Mrs. Gandle and 'Lizabeth, who were greatly astonished at the fuss made over the girl they had supposed friendless.

'Now let this be a lesson to you, 'Lizabeth,' said the good woman, several times. 'It ain't often as you'll lose by doin' a bit o' kindness, and the chance always is as it'll be paid back to you more than you'd never think. Anyone can see as this Mrs. Ormonde's a real lady, and when it comes to settlin' up, you'll see if she doesn't know how to behave *like* a lady.'

Mrs. Ormonde took a room at a private hotel near

King's Cross, whither her travelling bag was brought from Victoria. She avoided the part of the town in which acquaintances might hear of her, for her business had to be kept secret. A necessary letter despatched to Mrs. Mapper at The Chestnuts, she went once more to Bank Street and met her friend Dr. Lambe.

She told him, in general terms, all she knew of the circumstances which might have led to Thyrza's illness. At first she had been in doubt whether or not to go to Lambeth and see Lydia Trent, but on the whole it seemed better to take no steps in that direction for the present. Should the case be declared dangerous, Lydia of course must be sent for, but that was a dark possibility from which her thoughts willingly averted themselves. The sister could doubtless throw some light on Thyrza's strange calamity. What did the child's 'You know you promised me' mean? But that would be no aid to the physician, upon whom for the present most depended. Nor did Dr. Lambe exhibit much curiosity. He seemed quickly to gather all it was really necessary for him to know, and, though he admitted that the disorder was likely to be troublesome, he gave an assurance that there was no occasion for alarm.

'You are not associated in her mind with anything distressing?' he asked of Mrs. Ormonde.

'I believe, the opposite.'

'Good. Then be by her side as often as you can, so that she may recognise you as soon as possible.' He

added with a smile: 'I needn't inform Mrs. Ormonde how to behave when she *is* recognised!'

They were at a little distance from the bed, and both looked at the unconscious face.

'A very beautiful girl,' the doctor murmured.

'But you should see her in health.'

'No. I am a trifle susceptible. Well, well, we shall have her through it, no doubt.'

We have to jest a little in the presence of suffering, or how should we live our lives?

The recognition came late on the following afternoon. Thyrza had lain for a time with eyes open, watching the movements of the nurse, but seemingly with no desire to speak. Then Mrs. Ormonde came in. The watchful look at once turned upon her; for a moment that former fear showed itself, and Thyrza made an effort to rise from the pillow. Her strength was too far wasted. But as Mrs. Ormonde drew near, she was plainly known.

'Thyrza, you know me now?'

'Mrs. Ormonde,' was whispered, still with look of alarm and troubled inability to comprehend.

'You have been ill, dear, and I have come to sit with you,' the other went on, in a soothing voice. 'Shall I stay?'

There was no answer for a little, then Thyrza, with sudden revival of memory like a light kindled in her eyes, said painfully:

'Lyddy?—does Lyddy know?'

'Not yet. Do you wish her to?'

'No!—Don't tell Lyddy!—I shall be better——'

'No one shall know, Thyrza. Don't speak now. I am going to sit by you.'

Much mental disturbance was evident on the pale face for some time after this, but Thyrza did not speak again, and presently she appeared to sleep. Mrs. Ormonde left the house at midnight and was back again before nine the next morning. Thyrza had been perfectly conscious since daybreak and had several times asked for the absent friend. She smiled when Mrs. Ormonde came at length and kissed her forehead.

'Better this morning?'

'Much better, I think, Mrs. Ormonde. But I can't lift my arm—it's so heavy.'

The doctor came late in the morning. He was agreeably surprised at the course things were taking. But Thyrza was forbidden to speak, and for much of the day she relapsed into an apathetic, scarcely conscious state. Mrs. Ormonde had preferred not to leave her the evening before, and had explained by telegram her failure to keep her appointment with Mrs. Emerson. To-night she visited her friends by Regent's Park. On looking in at the eating-house before going to her hotel for the night, she found the patient feverish and excited.

'She has been asking for you ever since you went away,' whispered the nurse.

Thyrza inquired anxiously, as if the thought were newly come to her:

'How did you know where I was, Mrs. Ormonde?'

'Mrs. Gandle found my name and address in your pocket, and wrote to me.'

'In my pocket? Why should she look in my pocket?'

'She was anxious to have a friend come to you, Thyrza.'

'Does any one else know? Lyddy doesn't—nor anybody?'

'Nobody.'

'Yes, it was in my pocket. I kept it from that time when I went to—to—oh, I can't remember!'

'To Eastbourne, dear.'

'Yes—Eastbourne!'

The only way of quieting her was for Mrs. Ormonde to sit holding her hand. It was nearly dawn when the fit of fever was allayed and sleep came.

A week passed before it was possible to think of removing her from these miserable quarters to the other room which awaited her. Mrs. Ormonde's presence had doubtless been a great aid to the sufferer in her struggle with intermittent fever and mental pain. As Thyrza recovered her power of continuous thought, she showed less disposition to talk; the trouble which still hung above her seemed to impose silence. She was never quite still save when Mrs. Ormonde sat by her, but at those times she generally kept her face averted, closing

her eyes if either of her nurses seemed to watch her. She asked no questions. Mrs. Gandle came up occasionally, and to her Thyrza spoke very gently and gratefully. She asked to see 'Lizabeth, and that damsel made an elaborate toilette for the ceremony of introduction to the transformed sick-room.

'I don't believe as she's a workin' girl at all,' 'Lizabeth remarked mysteriously to her mother, afterwards. 'She's Mrs. Ormind's daughter, as has runned away from her 'ome, an' that's the truth of it.'

'Don't be silly, 'Lizabeth! Why, there ain't no more likeness than in that there cabbage!'

'I don't care. That's what I think, an' think it I always shall, choose what!'

'You always was obstinit!'

'Dessay I was, an' it's good as some people is. It wouldn't do for us all to think the same way; it 'ud spoil our appetites.'

One day of the week Mrs. Ormonde spent at Eastbourne. During her absence from home no letter had come from Egremont; she expected daily to hear from Mrs. Mapper that he had called at The Chestnuts, but nothing was seen of him. She preferred to keep silence, though her anxiety was constant. Out of the disparaging rumours which had found ready credence in the circle of the Tyrrells, and the facts which she had under her own eyes, it was not difficult for her to construct a story whereby this catastrophe could be explained without attributing anything more than misfortune to either

Egremont or Thyrza. Her suppositions came very near to the truth. A natural, inevitable, error was that she imagined a scene of mutual declaration between the two. She could only conjecture that in some way they had frequently met, with the result which, the characters of both being understood, might have been foreseen. Possibly Egremont had thrown aside every consideration and had asked Thyrza to abandon Grail for his sake; in that case, it might be that Thyrza had fled from what she regarded as dishonourable selfishness, unable to keep her promise to Grail, alike unable to find her own happiness at his expense.

This was supposing the best. But, as a woman who knew the world, she could not altogether deny approach to fears which, in speaking with Annabel, she would not glance at. It was unlike Egremont to pass through a crisis such as this without having recourse to her sympathy, which had so long been to him as that of a mother. Perhaps he could not speak to her.

In any case, the immediate future was full of difficulties. It was a simple matter to take Thyrza to the Emersons' lodgings and get her restored to health, but what must then become of her? The best hope was that even yet she might marry Grail. Between the latter and Egremont doubtless everything was at an end; all the better, if there remained a possibility of Thyrza's forgetting this trial and some day fulfilling her promise. But in the meantime—a period, perhaps, of years—what must be done? The sisters might of

course live together as hitherto and earn their living in the accustomed way, but Mrs. Ormonde understood too well the dangers of an attempt to patch together old and new. There was no foreseeing the effect of her sufferings on Thyrza's character; in spite of idealisms, suffering more often does harm than good.

In fact, she must become acquainted with the truth of the case before she could reasonably advise or help. It had seemed wise as yet to keep the discovery of Thyrza a secret, even though by disclosing it she might have alleviated others' pain. When Lydia should at length be told, perhaps difficulties would in one way or another be lessened.

Mrs. Ormonde at length spoke to the invalid of the plan for removing her. Thyrza made no reply, but, when her friend went on to speak of the people in whose care she would be, averted her eyes as if in trouble. Mrs. Ormonde was silent for a while, then asked:

'Would you like your sister to come, when you are in the other house?'

Thyrza shook her head. She would have spoken, but instead sobbed.

'But she must be in dreadful trouble, Thyrza.'

'Will you write to her, please, Mrs. Ormonde? Don't tell her where I am, but say that I am well again. I can't see her yet—not till I have begun to work again. Do you think I can soon go and find work?'

'Do you wish, then, to live by yourself?' Mrs.

Ormonde asked, hoping that the conversation might lead Thyrza to reveal her story.

'Yes, I must live by myself. I mustn't see anyone for a long time. I can earn as much as I need. If I can't find anything else, Mrs. Gandle will let me stay with her.'

There was silence. Then she turned her face to Mrs. Ormonde, and, with drooping eyelids, asked in a low voice:

'Do you know why I left home, Mrs. Ormonde?'

'No, I don't, Thyrza,' the other replied gently. 'I have not seen any of your friends. I think very likely you are the only one that could tell me the truth.'

'Lyddy knows,' was spoken presently, after the shedding of a few quiet tears. 'I left a letter for her. Besides, she knew before—knew that——'

The voice faltered and ceased.

'Can you tell me what it was, Thyrza?'

'I didn't do anything wrong, Mrs. Ormonde. But I was going to be married—do you remember about Mr. Grail?'

'Yes, dear.'

'I couldn't marry him—I didn't love him.'

She turned her face upon the pillow. Mrs. Ormonde touched her with kind hand, and, when she saw that the girl could tell no more, tried to soothe her.

'I understand now, Thyrza. I know it must have been a great trouble that drove you to this. I will do nothing that you don't wish. But we must let Lyddy

know that you are in safety. Suppose you write a letter and tell her that you have been ill, but that you are quite well again, and with friends. You needn't put any address on it, and you had better not mention my name. It will be enough for the present to relieve her mind.'

'Yes, I'll do that, Mrs. Ormonde, if I can write.'

'You will be able to, very soon. It would frighten Lyddy if the letter came to her written in a strange hand.'

Mrs. Ormonde made up her mind not to let it be known that she was in communication with Thyrza. Much was still dubious, but clearly it would be the wise course to avoid the possibility of Egremont's discovering Thyrza's place of abode. For the sake of the long future, a little more must be borne in the present. She had more than Thyrza's interests to keep in mind; Egremont's happiness was also at stake, and that, after all, was the first concern with her. By prudent management, perhaps the lives of both could be saved from this seeming wreck, and sped upon their several ways—ways surely very diverse.

But Thyrza was troubled with desire to ask something. When tears had heightened the relief of having told as much as she might, she asked timidly:

'Do you know if Mr. Grail has gone to the library —Mr. Egremont's library?'

'I have not heard. Could he go after this happening, Thyrza?'

'Yes,' she replied eagerly, 'he would go just the same. Why shouldn't he? It wouldn't prevent that, just because I didn't marry him. He would go and live there with Mrs. Grail, his mother. I said, when I wrote to Lyddy, that he'd go to the library just the same. There was no reason why he shouldn't, Mrs. Ormonde.'

She grew so agitated that Mrs. Ormonde, whilst asking herself what further light this threw on the matter, endeavoured to remove her trouble.

'Then no doubt he has gone, Thyrza. We shall hear all about it very soon.'

'You think he really has? We were to have been away for a week, and then have gone to live at the library. Haven't you heard anything from——'

'From whom, dear?'

'Anything from Mr. Egremont? He was beginning to put the books on the shelves—I was told about that. It was all ready for Gilbert to go and begin. Haven't you heard about it, Mrs. Ormonde?'

'I've been away from home, you see. No doubt there are letters for me.'

'I shall be so glad when I know, Mrs. Ormonde. You'll tell me, when you've heard, won't you, please? I've been thinking about it a long time—before I was ill, and again since I got my thoughts back. I want to be sure of that, more than anything. I'm sure he must have gone. Mr. Egremont was going away somewhere, and when he came back of course he would be

told about—about me, and he wouldn't let that make any difference to Gilbert. And then I told Lyddy in the letter that I should come back some day. I'm quite sure it wouldn't keep him from going to the library.'

Mrs. Ormonde was herself very desirous of knowing what turn things had taken in Lambeth. She had no ready means of inquiry. But doubtless Mr. Newthorpe would have intelligence; it was only too certain that the affair was being discussed to its minutest details among the people who knew Egremont. She determined to see Mr. Newthorpe as soon as Thyrza was transported to the house by Regent's Park.

This took place on the following day, with care which could not have been exceeded had the invalid been a person as important and precious as even the late Miss Paula Tyrrell. Mrs. Gandle was adequately recompensed; her conviction that Mrs. Ormonde was a real lady suffered no shock under this most delicate of tests. Mrs. Ormonde bade farewell to Bank Street and Caledonian Road with a great hope that duty or necessity might never lead her thither again.

The fact that the Emersons rented one room more than they really needed was due to the recent departure of a sister of Mr. Harold Emerson, who had for a time shared their home and the expenses thereof, and who they hoped might again return to them. We shall talk of these circumstances more in detail presently. Thyrza still, of course, needed the nurse's

attendance, and accommodation was found for that person under the same roof. When the party arrived, at mid-day, Mrs. Emerson was at home by appointment. She assisted in carrying the invalid upstairs, where a bright warm room was in readiness—as pleasant a change after the garret in Bank Street as anyone could have desired.

'Isn't Mr. Emerson at home?' Mrs. Ormonde asked, when, with her friend, she came down to the sitting-room.

'I am so sorry,' was the rather troubled answer. 'He thought he would be, but after all he had to go off on business. It is so disappointing.'

The gentleman had been detained somewhere or other on business when Mrs. Ormonde made her call a few evenings before.

'I should have liked to see him,' Mrs. Ormonde remarked with disappointment.

She talked over various matters relating to Thyrza, then took her leave and went on to the Tyrrells.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOPE SURPRISED.

Mrs. Tyrrell and Annabel were lunching with friends somewhere; Mr. Newthorpe had just taken a solitary meal in the room which he used for a study. Thither Mrs. Ormonde was conducted.

She noticed that he looked by no means as well as he had done before leaving Eastbourne. His greeting was nervous. He would not sit down, preferring to move restlessly from one position to another.

'I was about to write to you,' he said. 'What news do you bring?'

'I have come to you for news.'

'But you have seen Egremont?'

'Neither seen nor heard from him.'

'Then I suppose that settles the matter. I went to his place once, but could hear nothing of him; and since then I have just waited till the muddy water should strain itself clear again.'

'But I am in ignorance yet of the state of things in Lambeth,' said Mrs. Ormonde. 'Do you know anything about the library?'

'Dalmaine keeps our world supplied with the latest information,' Mr. Newthorpe replied, with cold sarcasm. 'The library scheme, I suppose, is at an end. The man Grail, we are told, pursues his old occupation.'

Mrs. Ormonde kept silence. The other continued, assuming a tone of cheerful impartiality:

'Really it is very instructive, an affair of this kind. One knows very well, theoretically, how average humanity fears and hates a nature superior to itself; but one has not often an opportunity of seeing it so well illustrated in practice. Tyrrell's attitude has especially amused me; his lungs begin to crow like chanticleer as often as the story comes up for discussion. He has a good deal of personal liking for Egremont, but to see "the idealist" in the mud he finds altogether too delicious. His wife feels exactly in the same way, though she expresses her feeling differently. And Dalmaine—if I were an able-bodied man I rather think I should have kicked Dalmaine downstairs before this. "Lo you, what comes of lofty priggishness!"—that is his text, and he enlarges on it in a manner worthy of himself. And the amazing thing is that it never occurs to these people to explain what has happened on any but the least charitable hypothesis.'

'What of Annabel?' Mrs. Ormonde asked.

'She seems to have no interest in the matter. So far so good, perhaps.' He added, with a smile, 'She is revenging herself for her years of retirement.'

'I supposed so. And really seems to be enjoying herself?'

'Astonishingly. I don't see much of her. She came in the other night to tell me that a Captain Somebody had proposed to her after six minutes of acquaintance, and laughed more gaily over it than I ever saw her. It's part of her education, of course; probably it was wise to postpone it no longer. I wait with curiosity to hear her opinion of this world at the end of July.'

Mrs. Ormonde mused. Mr. Newthorpe walked about a little, then asked:

'What do you prophesy of their future?'

'Of whose future?'

'Egremont's and his wife.'

'You are premature. He is not married.'

'Oh, then you are not altogether without news?'

'I shall take you into my confidence. I find the responsibility a little too burdensome. The fact is, this girl, Thyrza Trent, is at present in my care.'

She gave a succinct account of the recent events, and explained them as far as her information allowed. The all-important point still remained obscure, but she showed her reasons for believing that something had passed between Egremont and Thyrza which could lead to but one result if they met again, now that the old objections were at an end.

'My desire is,' she pursued, 'to prevent that meeting. I have racked my brains over the matter, with

no better result than Mrs. Grundy would at once have arrived at by noble intuition. It would be a grave mistake for Walter to marry this girl.'

'On general grounds, or from your special knowledge of her character?'

'Both. A third reason is—that I have long ago made up my mind whom he is to marry.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Newthorpe, gravely, the worry he no longer cared to conceal making him look old and feeble, 'yes, but that project has hardly become more hopeful during the last few weeks.'

'We have to think of a lifetime. I have by no means lost hope. I fear the atmosphere in which you are living has some effect upon you. The case stands thus: Walter has done nothing in the least dishonourable, but he has been carried away, as any imaginative young fellow would probably have been under the circumstances. The girl is very beautiful, wonderfully sweet and lovable; if a man ruined himself to obtain her I dare say it would be a long time before he repented.'

'At least six months.'

'No, I can't joke about Thyrza. I love her myself, and if I can by any means guide her life into a smooth channel it will make me very happy. But she must not marry Walter; that would assuredly *not* be for her happiness. The prospect before her was ideal, too good, of course, to be realised. We must devise some other future for her.'

'You think of taking her definitively from her former sphere?'

'There is no choice. She can't go and work for her living in the old way; I foresee too well what the end of *that* would be. She must either be raised or fall into the black gulfs—so beautifully is our society constructed. For the present she has to recover her health; the doctor tells me her constitution is very delicate. She must come to the sea-side as soon as she is well enough. I mustn't have her in my house, because Walter may come any day; but it will have to be Eastbourne, I fancy, as I don't know how to make plans for her elsewhere. And in the meantime we must think.'

'A question occurs to me. Is it quite certain that she won't of her own motion communicate with Egremont?'

'It is a question, of course. But I can't do more than take all reasonable precautions. I have a hope, though, that before long she will confide in me completely. The poor child knows nothing of this scandal; she even believes that Mr. Grail will take the librarianship as if nothing had happened. I can't with certainty foresee what effect it will have upon her when she hears the truth. Of course she must see her sister before very long. In the meantime, I have to tell her that things are going on quite smoothly; it is the only way to keep her calm.'

'What of the sister? Is she a person to be trusted?'

'I don't know her; but from the way in which Thyrza always speaks of her, I should think she is very trustworthy. She is some years older.'

After some further conversation, Mr. Newthorpe asked:

'What is Egremont doing, then, do you suppose?'

'I can form no idea.'

'Won't you write to him?'

'I think not. The poor fellow is, no doubt, going through his "everlasting Nay," as he used to say a few years ago; I fear it has come in earnest this time. He will come to me when I can really be of use to him. If I see him just now I shall have to act too much—I am bad at that.'

'Had I better try to find him?'

'Write, if you like, and see what answer you get.'

'A gloomy business for that poor fellow in Lambeth.'

'Yes, it's hard that one can give so little thought to him. If I speak the very truth, I still have a secret hope that she may marry him. But all in good time. What a blessed thing Time is! It makes everything easy.'

'It does. Most of all, when it destroys itself.'

He said it with a sad smile. Mrs. Ormonde turned again to the subject of Annabel. They decided that it was better to say nothing to her as yet.

In a fortnight Thyrza went to Eastbourne. She

had written a letter to Lydia a few days after her establishment with Mrs. Emerson—a letter without any address at the head of it. Mrs. Emerson posted it in a remote district, that the office stamp might give no clue. Mrs. Ormonde provided her with lodgings at the side of Eastbourne farthest from The Chestnuts, in the house of a decent woman who did sewing for the Home. That her days might not become wearisome for lack of occupation, it was arranged that Thyrza should give her landlady occasional help with the needle.

Her main task, however, was to recover health and strength. The sea air helped her a little, but the heaviness of her heart kept her frame languid. At first she could walk only the shortest distances; as soon as she reached the sands, she would sit down wearily and fix her eyes seawards, gazing with what other thoughts than when that horizon met her vision for the first time! She had great need of uttering all her sorrow, but could not do so to Mrs. Ormonde; it seemed to her that it would be an unpardonable presumption to speak of Mr. Egremont as she thought of him, and perhaps she could not have brought herself to tell such a secret, whoever had been involved in it, to one who, kind as she was, remained in many senses a stranger. To Lyddy, and to her alone, she could have poured out all her heart. The longing for her sister was now ceaseless. She grieved that she had left London without seeing her. In the night she

sometimes cried for hours because Lyddy was so far from her.

Mrs. Ormonde came to see her every other day. Though nothing had been said on the point, Thyrza understood that, for some reason, she was not expected to go to The Chestnuts. And, indeed, it was too far for her to walk in her present weak state.

But one evening she was drawn in that direction. Her landlady had gone to Hastings, and would be absent till the next day. It was not the day for Mrs. Ormonde's visit, and rain since morning had made it impossible to leave the house; the hours had dragged wearily. After tea the clouds broke, and soon there were warm rays from the westering sun. Thyrza was glad to leave her room. She walked into the main street of the town, for her solitude was become a pain, and she felt a desire to be among people, even though she could speak to no one. She came to the tree-shadowed road which, as she well remembered, led to Mrs. Ormonde's house. It tempted her on; she would like to look at the house. A friend lived there, and her heart ached to be near someone who cared for her. The prime need of her life was love, and love alone could restore her strength and give her courage to live.

It was nearer than she thought. Though troubled by the consciousness that she ought not to have come so far in this direction, and that perhaps her strength would be overtaxed before she could reach home again, she went still on and on, until, reaching the point

where another road joined that by which she had come, she found The Chestnuts just before her. Beyond the house, the hill rose darkly and hid the setting sun. As she stood, a man issued from the adjoining road and walked straight towards the entrance of the garden. Her eyes followed him, and, though for a moment she did not believe their evidence, they told her that Egremont had passed so near to her that a whisper would have drawn his attention.

She was in the shade of thick trees; perhaps that circumstance, and the dark colour of her dress, accounted for his not observing her. He was walking quickly, too, and was looking fixedly at the house.

She followed. Had her voice been at her command, in that instant of recognition she would have called to him. But all her powers seemed to desert her, and she was rather borne onwards than advanced by any effort of her own.

He had passed through the gate when she reached the end of the garden wall. Losing him from sight, she understood what she was doing, and stayed her steps. A sense of having escaped a great danger made her tremble so that she feared she must fall to the ground if she could not find some place in which to rest. A few steps brought her into a piece of common ground, which lay in the rear of the garden, and here, at the foot of the wall, were some pieces of timber, the severed limbs of a tree that had fallen in the past winter. Here she could sit, leaning against the

brickwork and letting her heart throb itself into quietness.

The wall was a low one, and above it in this place rose a screen of trellis, overgrown with creepers, making the rear of a spacious summer-house, which Mrs. Ormonde had had constructed for the use of children who had to be sheltered from too much either of sun or breeze when they were brought out of doors. Thyrza had not been resting for more than a minute or two, when a voice spoke from the other side of the wall, so plainly that she started, thinking she was observed and addressed. The voice was Mrs. Ormonde's.

'So at last,' she said, 'you have come.'

There was a brief silence, then the tones for which she waited once more fell upon her ear.

'You are alone to-night?' asked Egremont.

'Quite. I have been reading and thinking. Shall we go into the house?'

'If you will let me, I had rather sit with you here.'

Again there was silence. When Mrs. Ormonde spoke, it was in a lower voice, and such as one uses in reply to a look of affection.

'Why have you kept me in anxiety about you for so long, Walter?'

'I have had no mind to speak to anyone, not even to you. I had nothing to tell you that would please you to hear. Often I have resolved to leave England for good, and give no account of myself to anyone. It seemed unkind of you not to write. I waited till I

knew you must have heard all that people had to say of me, and then every day I expected your letter. You could only be silent for one reason.'

'Why, then, have you come now?'

'Because I am ill and can be alone no longer.'

Thyrza scarcely breathed. It was as though all her senses had merged in one—that of hearing. Her eyes beheld nothing, and she was conscious of no more bodily pain. She listened for the very breathing of the two, who were so close to her that she might almost have touched them.

'How do you know that people are occupying themselves with your concerns at all?'

'From Jersey I went to France. When I reached London again, knowing nothing of what had happened whilst I was away, I met Dalmaine and his wife at Charing Cross station. They turned away, and refused to speak to me. When I got home, I found what it meant. Grail told me plainly what the general opinion was.'

'You saw Grail?'

'Of course. You think, naturally, that I should have hidden my face from him.'

'Don't be so harsh with me. You forget that I have still to learn everything.'

'Yes, I will tell you; I will explain; I will defend myself. I want your sympathy, and I will do my best to prove that I am not contemptible.'

'Hush! Be quiet for a moment. I have not

written t you because I thought it needless to make conjectures, and ask questions, and give assurances, when you were sure, sooner or later, to come and tell me the whole story. I won't pretend that I have not had my moments of uneasiness. For instance, I wrote to you to Jersey, and the letter was returned to me; that came disagreeably, in connection with news I just then had from London; it was only human to suppose that for some reason you had talked of going to Jersey, and then had not gone there at all.'

'Grail followed me there, and failing to find me, of course had the same thought.'

'And yet, you know, I could think more calmly than was possible for him. Now tell me all that you wish. What had happened, that this suspicion fell upon you?'

Thyrza heard a complete and truthful account of all that had passed between herself and Egremont, from the first meeting in the library to their parting near Lambeth Bridge.

Then Mrs. Ormonde asked:

'And where is she?'

'If only I knew! She has written to her sister, but without saying where she is, only that she has been ill, and is safe with people who are kind to her.'

'And what is your explanation of her disappearance?'

'I believe she could not marry Grail, loving another man.'

The silence that followed seemed very long to the listener. She dreaded lest they should end their conversation here. In that story of those meetings and partings, as told by Egremont, there had now and then been a word, a tone, that seemed to bear meaning yet incredible to her. By degrees she was realising all that her flight had entailed upon those she left, things undreamt of hitherto. But the last word of explanation was still to come. She did not dare to anticipate it, yet her life seemed to depend upon his saying something more.

'Have you made efforts to find her?' Mrs. Ormonde at length asked.

'Every possible effort.'

'With what purpose?'

'Need I tell you?'

'You think it is your duty to offer her reparation for what she has suffered, because you were unwillingly the cause of it?'

'Yes, if that is the same thing as saying that I love her, and that I wish to make her my wife.'

'In a sense I suppose it is the same thing. You have been compelled to think so much of her, that pity and a desire to do your best for an unhappy girl have come to seem love. Remember that, by your own admission, you are ill; you cannot judge soundly of anything, even of your own feelings. You have done a good deal of harm, Walter, though unintentionally; do you wish to do yet more?'

'How?'

'By binding yourself for life to a poor girl who can never by any possibility be a fit companion for you. I have seen such marriages; I have seen the beginning of them, and the end. You, least of all men, should fall into such an error. Oh yes, I know; you are not brutal; you would never as much as speak an unkind word. No, but you would do what in this case would be worse. Brutally treated, Thyrza would die and be out of her misery; with you, she would drag through years of increasing wretchedness. Your thwarted life would be her long torture. Remember how often I have told you that you have much that is feminine in your character. You have little real energy; you are passive in great trials; it is easier to you to suffer than to act. Your idealism is often noble, but never heroic. You have talked to me of your natural nearness to people of the working class, and I firmly believe that you are further from them—for any such purpose as this in question—than many a man who counts kindred among the peerage. You have a great deal of spiritual pride, and it will increase as your mind matures. You think you *are* mature: tell me in ten years (if I am alive, old woman that I am!) how you look back on your present self. Walter Egremont, if ever you ask Thyrza to marry you, you will be acting with cruel selfishness—yes, selfishness, for all that you would pay bitterly for it in the end. You will be acting in a way utterly unworthy of a man who has studied and reflected.'

Thyrza heard Egremont laugh.

'To hear all this from you,' he said, 'surprises me very much.'

'You credit me with so little power of mind?'

'I thought you were the last to talk the common talk of the world that has outlived its generous instincts.'

'Pray believe that there is such a thing as outliving youthful passion, and yet retaining all the generous feeling that you speak of. I am not an ignoble schemer, and you know that I am not. Think over my arguments before you scorn me.'

'You think me so boyish and weak-minded that I cannot distinguish between pure love and base? One thing I left out of my narrative just now. I ought to have said that I was *not* wholly without blame in that intercourse. I strove with myself to seem nothing more than friendly to her, and yet I know that at times I spoke as no mere friend would have done, and simply because I could not help it. I loved Thyrza even then with more intensity of pure feeling than I had ever before known, and now I love her with a love which lasts a lifetime. You have no right to pronounce so confidently upon her fitness or unfitness to mate with me; your knowledge of her is very slight. I know her as a woman can only be known by the man who loves her. You cannot judge for me in this case; no one could judge for me. I shall act on my conviction; it is poor waste of life to do otherwise.'

A pause, whereof the seconds were to one ear beaten out in heart-throbs. Then Mrs. Ormonde said, very quietly:

'You have told Mr. Grail of this intention?'

'Yes.'

'It has never occurred to you that the great wrongs this man has suffered might yet be repaired, perchance, if you were willing to let them be?'

'I have suffered on his account more than I can say. But it is certain that he and Thyrza would never marry after this.'

'I see no such certainty.'

'Then it merely comes to this, that he and I love the same woman, and must abide by her decision.'

'The library?'

'Gone. I can give no thought to it, for I am suffering a greater loss. Be human! Be honest! Would you not despise me if, loving her as I do, I came to you and puled about the overthrow of my schemes for founding a public library? Let it go! Let the people rust and rot in ignorance! I am a man of flesh and blood, and the one woman that the world contains is lost to me!'

Mrs. Ormonde seemed to think long over this passionate outcry. Egremont broke the silence.

'Once more, be human! She writes to her sister that she has been ill, but is now taken care of by friends. What friends? You are not ignorant of the world. How small a chance it is that she has fallen

among people who will protect her! A girl with her beauty, and so simple, so trustful—friends, indeed! I am all but frenzied to think of the dangers that may surround her. She is more to me than my life's blood, and perhaps even now she is in terrible need of some honest man to protect her. And you can talk coldly about prudence, about what we shall think and say years hence! Well, I can talk no more. To-morrow morning I shall go back to London and go on searching for her, walking about the streets day and night, wearing my life away in longing for her. I have done with the past, and all those I used to call my friends. There is no room in my thought for anything but her memory and the desire to find her. Let us say good-bye, Mrs. Ormonde. If I am wrong and selfish, as you say, then it is beyond my power to conquer the faults.'

The listener heard a deep sigh. Then:

'Walter, sit down; you are not going from me like that.'

'I can't stay; I can't talk as you wish to! I am so utterly miserable, and I came to you because I had always known you gentle and sympathetic.'

'I would never be anything else with you. But listen; have you entirely forgotten Annabel?'

'She is as little to me as if I had never seen her. You cannot say that I have any obligation to her. I asked her to be my wife, and she refused me; that was the end. There indeed, if you like, I was misled. I admired and respected her, and made myself believe

that it was love. Again and again I doubted myself, even then. Since I first knew that I loved Thyrza, I have never doubted one moment. You, for all your subtle analysis of my character, do not know me. You think I must have a woman of fine intellect for my companion. You are wrong. What I need, I have seen in one face, and one only.'

Mrs. Ormonde spoke in a changed voice.

'On one point I can set your mind at rest, and I will, for I cannot bear to see you suffering. It is true that Thyrza is with friends. I know the people with whom she is living.'

'You know them? You know where Thyrza is?'

'I found her where she lay ill; the chance of her having my address in her possession led the people of the house to send for me. I took her away, and put her in good care.'

'And you could keep this from me?'

'You see why I did. Can I trust you not to abuse my kindness?'

'You mean—— ?'

'That it will be wholly dishonourable if you make any attempt to discover her after this. Do so, and we are friends no longer.'

'How can you exact any such promise as that?'

'Because I am within my right in exacting it. I make a bargain with you, Walter. For two years from now Thyrza remains under my guardianship. At the end of that time, you are at liberty to see her. I give

you my word that neither directly nor indirectly will I seek to influence her affections as regards either you or Grail; I shall never speak to her on such subjects, nor will anyone with whom I have authority. Is it agreed?'

Poor heart, again beating out the seconds!

'Will Grail know where she is living?'

'He will not. She must see her sister from time to time, but it shall be away from her ordinary dwelling, and Thyrza will understand the conditions. I shall offer her no explanation; it shall merely be my desire, and if she prove untrustworthy in this small matter, I think you will admit that no harm has been done—you and I will only have a new light on her character. It is very simple, provided that we two can trust each other, and that Thyrza is what you think her. I need not say, by-the-by, that she will not be living here; you can freely come to me as often as you please.'

Would he never reply?

'For two years? That is a long time.'

'Not at all, the circumstances considered. Are you afraid of submitting your love to the test?'

'You ask me to trust you implicitly. It is a great thing, you being my enemy to begin with.'

'Your enemy? Well, then, your enemy; and still I ask you to trust me. I have never yet betrayed man or woman, Walter.'

'Never; that I know well! Forgive me. On this

day, this day of the month, two years hence, I may go to her?'

'On this day of the month, two years hence. Is it a bargain?'

'I agree. Thyrza could not be in safer keeping.'

He went on:

'What a load you have lifted from me! If that suspense had continued much longer, I don't know how I should have borne it. And you were with her in her illness? Tell me about her. Was she gravely ill? Tell me where you found her.'

'No; it is needless. I am a bad one to hear love confidences; I get impatient, and am apt to be satirical. I shall never talk to you of Thyrza.'

'But if she falls ill again, I must know.'

'I hope for better things. Tell me just one thing, before we change the subject. What is your opinion of her sister? What do you really know of her?'

'I know nothing save what I have gathered from Thyrza's talk, and from Grail's. I never saw her. But there can be little doubt that she is of sterling character.'

'Well, let it be. Now come in with me. I suppose you have had no thought for such a foolish ceremony as dinner?'

Their voices passed into silence. By this time it was dark, and the tall chestnuts beyond the house rustled in a cool breeze from the sea. Thyrza did not move for several minutes; when at length she endea-

voured to rise, her numbed limbs would scarcely sustain her. She looked up and saw the yellow crescent of a young moon sailing in a sky of delicate pearl hue.

One glance at the upper windows of the house, and then, with strength which seemed to pass into her limbs from the sharp air, she set out for the cottage which was her present home.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME

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